TOP-RATED TIRES P. 50
STOP HEADACHES FAST P. 42
POWERFUL VACUUMS P. 18

CR Consumer Reports®
FEBRUARY 2024

- RATINGS & REVIEWS
- SUVs
- Soundbars
- Blenders
- Car Batteries
- Frying Pans
- Cold Remedies
- Peanut Butters

HOW TO EAT LESS PLASTIC

There are unhealthy chemicals in many of our favorite foods. Here's what you can do right now to stay safer.

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ABOUT CONSUMER REPORTS Consumer Reports is an independent, nonprofit organization founded in 1936 that works side by side with consumers to create a safe, fair, and transparent marketplace. To achieve our mission, we test thousands of products and services in our labs each year and survey hundreds of thousands of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We pay for all the products we rate. We don't accept paid advertising.

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WORSE — BETTER

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Protecting Your Pocketbook

INFLATION HAS HAD a terrible impact on our money, forcing Americans to reconsider everything from what we buy at the grocery store to whether to purchase a new home. It's a reminder that, as a consumer-powered organization, protecting your pocketbook is a critical part of our mission.

That's why CR provides trusted tips on products and services at prices that won't bust your budget. From Amazon Prime Day to Black Friday—and every big sale in between—we advise you on the best deals out there. And while our top-rated items are those that work the best and last the longest, we use the CR Smart Buy label to highlight the top-rated products that offer great value for the money.

Beyond the countless products we can purchase online, today's marketplace also includes new digital services that help us handle our finances. Banking apps give us access to our accounts wherever we are. Peer-to-peer payment apps make it easier to transfer money. Budgeting apps help you track your spending and thus achieve your savings goals. There are big benefits to using these, but they also come with risks, such as threats to your data security. CR has investigated many of these new digital tools, and you can read our guide to using them safely on page 38.

CR also works with and for consumers to remove financial traps in the marketplace, such as excessive credit card late fees. Last year, American credit card debt hit new highs—and late fees can be as high as $41! This is why we're calling on the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to cap late fees at $8, which could save consumers up to $9 billion. You can help by signing our petition at **CR.org/cclatefees**.

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PHOTO: VICTORIA WILL

Fighting for Safer Food

In October, California passed a law banning four chemicals from being used in food and drinks sold or made in the state.

Each of the substances—brominated vegetable oil (BVO), potassium bromate, propyl paraben, and Red Dye No. 3—has been linked to serious health problems, including a higher risk of cancer, heart and liver problems, and developmental and reproductive issues. All are banned in the European Union.

The measure, which was co-sponsored by Consumer Reports and the Environmental Working Group, does not go into effect until January 2027. For now, the chemicals remain in hundreds of supermarket products, according to the EWG's Food Scores database, including some citrus-flavored sodas (BVO), packaged breads (potassium bromate), baked goods (propyl paraben), and artificially colored candy (Red Dye No. 3).

A similar bill has been introduced in New York state. CR and other safety advocates have urged states to ban the chemicals because, they say, the Food and Drug Administration does not adequately regulate food additives. In November, the FDA proposed banning BVO nationally.

Even without more federal action, the California law may persuade companies to reformulate their products nationally so they don't need to produce different products for specific jurisdictions. Some have already started: Just Born, maker of Peeps candies, told CR that none of its products will use Red Dye No. 3 after Easter 2024.

You can sign CR's petition urging the FDA to ban Red Dye No. 3 nationwide, at **CR.org/reddyeban**.

375

Number of supermarket products containing Red Dye No. 3 or other banned chemicals.

SOURCE: ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP FOOD SCORES DATABASE

CALL TO ACTION

CR's long-running campaign against hidden and unfair "junk" fees is paying off. The Federal Trade Commission, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and the Federal Communications Commission have all proposed rules that would require companies to disclose fees up front—or, with credit-card late fees, limit them altogether—across a wide range of industries. You can help urge policymakers to finalize these rules by signing our petition at **CR.org/stopjunkfees**. And tell us about your own struggles with junk fees at **CR.org/feestories**.

Securing Your Right to Repair

WHAT'S AT STAKE

We all know how difficult (and expensive) it is to get a cell phone or refrigerator repaired. But did you know that it is sometimes made more complicated by manufacturers—on purpose?

Some companies make it hard—or even impossible—for consumers (and independent repair shops) to access the parts, tools, and information to fix their products. This drives many consumers to manufacturer-authorized shops, which are often more expensive, or they just give up and buy a new product.

WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

CR has been a leading advocate for "right to repair" laws that would put an end to these practices. Our model legislation helped shape measures now on the books in New York and Minnesota, and working their way through dozens more state legislatures. We also built the right to repair into the Digital Standard, a set of best practices CR uses to evaluate digital products.

In October, California passed the strongest right-to-repair law yet, by covering appliances (which the New York law doesn't include) and requiring manufacturers to make repair resources available for at least seven years after a product was made. CR worked closely with lawmakers, testified at hearings on the bill, and mobilized CR members to urge lawmakers to support it.

Advocates hope the size of the California market, and the complications of navigating legal distinctions state by state, will persuade manufacturers to provide repair resources nationwide.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Support robust right-to-repair laws by signing CR's petition at **CR.org/righttorepair**.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN RITTER

Quick Fixes for Annoying Kitchen Problems
Save Hundreds on Car Insurance
Easy Ways to Keep Your Phone Charged
CR Consumer Reports
855 PRODUCTS RATED & REVIEWED
SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE
Top Picks OF THE YEAR

Our November/December 2023 article **"Quick Fixes for Annoying Kitchen Problems"** offered ways to make this important room safer, more efficient, and more enjoyable to work in. Readers shared their thoughts and questions. To add yours, head to **CR.org/kitchenfixes**.

YOU PROVIDE MANY useful tips. One of them, which we employed when we moved into our home two years ago, was to replace all incandescent bulbs with [longer-lasting] LED bulbs. However, our experience has been that the lights do not last 25 times longer than incandescent bulbs [as stated in the article] or the 13 to 22 years advertised on [some] manufacturer's boxes. We have eight recessed lights in our kitchen ceiling. Five of the eight have failed within two years! We have had similar experiences with LED bulbs in other fixtures. The bulb manufacturers do provide warranties. However, I never expected such failures and did not keep receipts or empty boxes. I'm very frustrated by the expense and inconvenience.
–Robert Jarrett, Albuquerque, NM

EDITOR'S NOTE *According to the Department of Energy, LEDs should last up to 25 times longer than equivalent incandescents. But as we noted in "The Right Lights for Your Home" in our January 2024 issue, "up to" is the operative phrase in that sentence: Your mileage may vary. The experts we consulted advised reading the warranty of any bulb and noting that it's based on a specific number of hours of use per day. One of the bulbs the pros recommended–the GE Sun Filled–offers 13.7 years of life on its packaging, but that's based on 3 hours of use per day. And the warranty on those bulbs is for three years, not 13. If your kitchen lights stay on most of the day, for example, their lifetime could be much shorter.*

IN THE ARTICLE you suggest purchasing a jar gripper to aid in opening up tight jar lids. It may be helpful to understand that the reason a jar can be difficult to open is the vacuum seal. I find it easier to wedge a screwdriver in between the jar and the lid, then give the screwdriver a twist until I hear a suction noise. Once the vacuum has been released, the jar is very easily opened.
–Michael LaBella, Huntington Beach, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE *Lots of folks have tried-and-true ways to open tough jars. (CR safety expert Ashita Kapoor runs a tight lid under warm water.) But we wouldn't recommend the one you suggest. The screwdriver could slip, injuring you, or the jar itself could slip and break.*

WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

CUSTOMER SERVICE STEPS

THE ADVICE IN "9 Secrets to Getting Great Customer Service" is valid only if the company cares about customer service. Two years ago I purchased three heat pumps [from a manufacturer]. The largest model has had over 25 service calls since installation–many when the unit was inoperable. I contacted the company's customer service department and got a case number, but no one ever called me back. I sent a certified letter to both the CEO and the residential HVAC manager. No response. I sent a letter to the board of directors. No response. Then I realized that this manufacturer doesn't care about customer service.
–Robert Frank, Hurst, TX

EDITOR'S NOTE *It's frustrating that all of your efforts went nowhere. After getting a case number, though, it might have been more effective to complain on social media than to escalate your complaints to the CEO and board of directors. Many companies put the resources they once allocated to reading paper correspondence into social*

media monitoring. We've heard many stories from people who got swift attention after posting publicly about their problem on X (formerly known as Twitter) or elsewhere.

ALCOHOL AND CHOLESTEROL

REGARDING "THE SAFER WAY to Drink": My doctor "prescribed" one alcoholic drink a day for me, among a few other things, in order to raise my HDL (high-density lipoprotein) levels. I have been able to raise my levels from 36 to 49. Is drinking alcohol [typically] advised to raise HDL levels? I will pose the same question to my doctor.
–Paul Stanuch, Maple Grove, MN

EDITOR'S NOTE *While we can't weigh in on medical advice from your doctor, some studies do show that light to moderate alcohol consumption can raise HDL ("good") cholesterol. The question is whether drinking helps your heart overall, and the latest research suggests that it doesn't. But the health risks of having one drink per day may be small depending on your health situation.*

DATA PRIVACY CONCERNS

IN YOUR "Ask Our Experts" column, you recommended coupon browser extensions. But wouldn't these allow the company to follow me all over the internet [collecting data]–and then sell that data?
–Mark Ayers, Forsyth, NC

EDITOR'S NOTE *It's smart to think twice about how much data you want to share–and with whom. Honey, the browser extension CR's shopping expert recommended, does collect data to help save you money, but it doesn't sell that data to third parties. You can read the details of Honey's privacy policy at joinhoney.com/privacy.*

DEVICE CHARGING TIPS

"HOW TO KEEP Your Phone Charged" didn't mention one cheap but valuable item: a charging pack that uses regular alkaline batteries. While a rechargeable battery pack is fine for the short run, if you have an extended period without access to electricity, you won't be able to recharge it. AA batteries are easy to come by and can be stockpiled during storm season.
–Jerry Schwartz, New Britain, CT

EDITOR'S NOTE *You can go that route, says Rich Fisco, the head of electronics testing at CR, but you'll need a lot of AA batteries to fully recharge a phone (potentially a dozen or more), and that gets pricey. You can buy a charger that's powered by solar cells or a hand crank for just such emergencies. But he recommends using the battery in your car instead. That one will quickly recharge your phone–and those of several family members–at no extra cost.*

DOES A CAR'S TRIM LEVEL AFFECT ITS GAS MILEAGE?

Regarding "Cars With the Best MPG": I would recommend that you list the MPG based on the trim level of the car. For example, the 2024 Toyota Camry Hybrid LE [the lowest trim level] weighs significantly less than the other models and has an EPA estimate of 52 MPG [combined]. The [higher] trim levels average out to 46 MPG.
—Steven Svengrowski, Brevard, NC

EDITOR'S NOTE *It's true that the weight of a car affects its gas mileage, and higher trim levels may weigh more due to larger wheels and/or sunroofs. But the added weight from those features tends to be small and thus has little real-world impact on a vehicle's MPG (comparable to driving with a passenger). Find the full results of our fuel-economy tests, based on popular trim levels, at CR.org/cars.*

OVEN CARE ADVICE

I NOTICED IN "CR's Ultimate Guide to Cooking Appliances" that many ovens have poor or nonexistent self-cleaning capability. What is the best way to clean an oven?
–Nancy Bartlett, Alameda, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE *Try this technique to loosen baked-on grime. Put on rubber gloves and then place a half-cup of household ammonia (a 5 to 10 percent concentration) in a glass bowl. Open your kitchen windows and place the bowl on the oven floor. Leave it in place for 8 to 12 hours. When the time is up, don the gloves again, and while wearing an R-95 mask (these can filter out aerosols, and many have a charcoal filter to reduce noxious odors), scrub the oven cavity with diluted dish soap (2 ounces in a gallon of water). Then, while running your faucet, pour the ammonia down the drain, keeping the water running a few seconds after to protect your pipes.*

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ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Smartphones

WE TESTED: 54 models
WE TEST FOR: A phone's calling, texting, and web browsing performance; its video quality and battery life; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 75
Range: 38-87

THE LATEST FOR APPLE USERS
Apple iPhone 15 Pro Max
$1,199

87 OVERALL SCORE

TOP-RATED ANDROID
Samsung Galaxy S23 Ultra
$1,099

85 OVERALL SCORE

A BARGAIN BUY
One Plus 10 Pro 5G
$440

78 OVERALL SCORE

Microwave Ovens

WE TESTED: 139 countertop and over-the-range models
WE TEST FOR: How evenly a model reheats cold mashed potatoes and defrosts 1 lb. of frozen ground chuck; speed of heating; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 65
Range: 25-86

GREAT OVER-THE-RANGE
LG MVEL2033F
$400

79 OVERALL SCORE

BEST MIDSIZED COUNTERTOP
Breville Smooth Wave BMO850BSS1BUC1
$400

73 OVERALL SCORE

LARGE COUNTERTOP FOR LESS
Vissani EC042A2KJ
$200

72 OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

How can I extend the life of my microwave oven?

TO AVOID REPLACING your microwave more than once every 10 years—which is how long most manufacturers tell us they should last—you'll need to be mindful of how you use and clean it, especially if you have an over-the-range (OTR) model, which can be tricky to replace and cost hundreds to repair. Try not to slam the door closed, which can break its latches. Sponge up spills as they occur; bits of food left inside can absorb the microwave's energy when you use it again, creating a hot spot that can damage the interior. For OTR models, clean the grease filter every few months by soaking it in hot water with a few drops of dish soap. A dirty filter can cause the fan to run less efficiently and can be a fire hazard.

ILLUSTRATION: JOSEPH CARRINGTON

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org**.

Soundbars

WE TESTED: 38 full-featured models
WE TEST FOR: How easy it is to use; its sound quality; the types of features it offers (like surround sound); and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 56
Range: 41-74

SUPER VERSATILE
LG SC9S
$700

74 OVERALL SCORE

EASY TO USE
Sonos Beam (Gen 2)
$500

70 OVERALL SCORE

GOOD SOUND FOR LESS
Samsung HW-Q60C/ZA
$250

67 OVERALL SCORE

Mini Fridges

WE TESTED: 8 models
WE TEST FOR: A fridge's ability to achieve and maintain a desired temperature; freezer performance (where applicable); noise; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 61
Range: 50-80

EXCELLENT & LARGEST CAPACITY
Danby DAR044A4BDD-6
$290

80 OVERALL SCORE

VERY QUIET & HAS A FREEZER
Midea WHD-113FSS1
$260

78 OVERALL SCORE

NICE PRICE BUT LESS ENERGY-EFFICIENT
Arctic King ATMP032AES
$140

60 OVERALL SCORE

Carbon Monoxide (CO) Detectors

WE TESTED: 31 stand-alone CO and combination CO and smoke detectors
WE TEST FOR: How accurate and timely a model's response is to carbon monoxide at high and low levels.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 71
Range: 44-93

SAFEST STAND-ALONE CHOICE & PLUGS IN
First Alert CO615
$35

91 OVERALL SCORE

BEST COMBINATION CO & SMOKE DETECTOR
Universal Security Instruments MIC3510SB
$45

89 OVERALL SCORE

STAND-ALONE THAT RUNS ON A 10-YEAR BATTERY
X-Sense CD01
$35

74 OVERALL SCORE

Rowing Machines

WE TESTED: 6 models
WE TEST FOR: How easy a rower is to operate, including adjusting the resistance level; its ergonomics; sturdiness of the construction; user safety; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 77
Range: 60-95

TOP PICK
Peloton Row Basics
$2,995

95 OVERALL SCORE

HIGHER WEIGHT CAPACITY (UP TO 375 LB.)
Hydrow the Hydrow Rower
$2,495

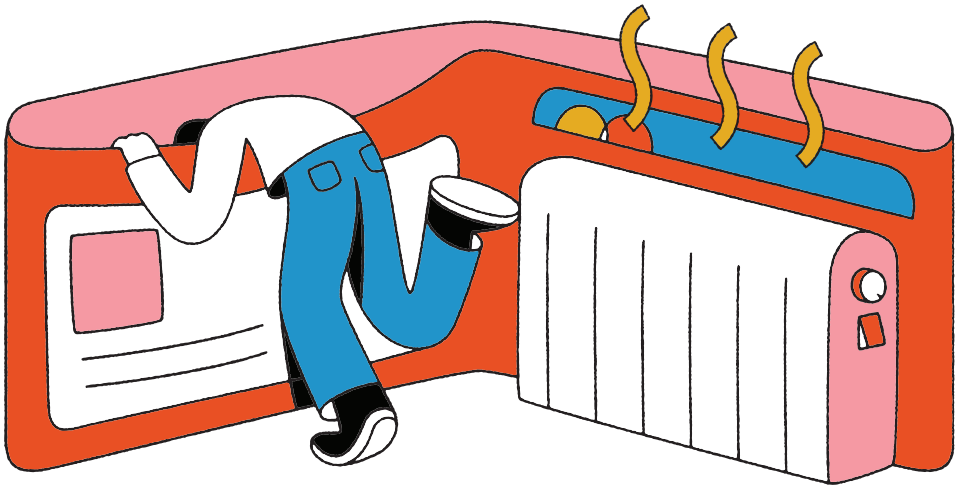
95 OVERALL SCORE

GREAT DEAL
Sunny Health & Fitness Magnetic Rowing Machine
$205

82 OVERALL SCORE

Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.*

COMING NEXT MONTH Dishwashers & More



My den is always chilly. Should I turn up the heat in the whole house or just use a space heater in one room?

USING A SPACE HEATER can be a good way to boost the temperature in a small, drafty room—and is likely to be less expensive than cranking up your central heating system. But a space heater is only economical if you use it judiciously. That's because, in general, electric heat is pricier than natural gas (which is the most common type of whole-home heating fuel).

Keep in mind that many of the space heaters we've tested are claimed to heat only about 150 to 200 square feet, and most use 1,500 watts when on the highest heat setting, which costs about $2 per 8-hour day or over $50 a month (though local costs vary). So it's best to run a space heater only when you really need one, such as when you're warming a room you're in for a few hours at a time. Look for a model in our ratings that's good at both whole-room heating and spot heating, like the Comfort Zone CZ499R ($65). But don't leave space heaters on overnight or unattended for long periods of time because they can be a fire hazard.

There are other economical ways to keep your heating bill in check this winter. For example, raise your shades when the sun is out to help warm colder rooms naturally. You can also lower your thermostat by a few degrees at night. Every degree you take off can reduce heating costs by about 1 percent a month. And when you're away from home, set your thermostat 7 to 10 degrees lower than the usual daytime temperature, which could save roughly 10 percent off your heating bill.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at CR.org/askourexperts ... and watch for the answers.

How can I tell if the health info on a website is trustworthy?

YOU'RE RIGHT to be skeptical. "The potential for things to look legit but not be is really tremendous," says Sarah Nosal, MD, an assistant professor of family medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City.

The good news: A few steps can help you find accurate intel. First, be aware that Google is not always the best place to search. You may end up at commercial websites (identified by URLs ending in .com), which may focus on selling products. So scrutinize the mission of the site owner or sponsor, and be skeptical if a site offers quick and easy solutions.

For more reliable information, begin with websites run by government agencies (at .gov URLs), medical associations (often .org), or academic institutions (.edu). Consider, for example, medlineplus.gov, which is useful for checking symptoms and conditions; cdc.gov for information about public health, including vaccines; cancer.gov for the latest on cancer treatments, risks, and symptoms; and heart.org, run by the American Heart Association, for guidance on heart health. The Medical Library Association also lists credible health sites at mlanet.org/page/top-health-websites. Your doctor may even have an online patient portal that includes links and/or answers to less urgent questions, as well as a way to leave a note or question for your doctor directly. But no matter what you read online, talk to your doctor about your concerns.

When is the best time to get a deal on a 2024 vehicle?

FEBRUARY IS USUALLY a good time to buy. Last year CR found that 2023 models were discounted 4 to 8 percent off the sticker price during Presidents Day sales. Matt Jones, senior director of industry and dealer relations at TrueCar, which tracks industry trends, says that discounts this year should be similar, with even more incentives (like cash-back offers or free add-ons), particularly for more expensive vehicles. "Presidents Day sales offers start to roll out in the beginning of February," he says. Dealerships also tend to offer comparable discounts during Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends.

But Gabe Shenhar, associate director at CR's Auto Test Center, advises car buyers not to rush because of a holiday promotion. "It's better to take the time to research your options before buying," he says.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSEPH CARRINGTON

IN THE KNOW

The Best Relief for a Bad Cold

DRUGSTORE AISLES are filled with cold medicines promising to help reduce your congestion, coughing, and body aches. But in September 2023, a Food and Drug Administration advisory panel declared that the decongestant phenylephrine (an ingredient commonly found in over-the-counter cold medicines like DayQuil and Sudafed PE) was ineffective when taken orally. But the products shown here—combined with rest and drinking plenty of fluids—can help you feel less stuffy and achy. Also try using a steroid nasal spray such as fluticasone, or, for coughs, dextromethorphan (an OTC cough suppressant).

HUMIDIFIER

Levoit Dual 200S Smart $55

A cool mist humidifier in the bedroom can help shrink swollen nasal passages, making it easier to breathe. This small-room humidifier is a top performer in our tests. It's also super-quiet and energy-efficient.

93 OVERALL SCORE

NETI POT

SinuCleanse Soft Tip Neti Pot $10

Using a neti pot helps relieve nasal congestion by funneling a saline-water solution into one nostril and letting it flow out of the other. (Always use distilled water.) Research shows that neti pots can also improve symptoms like a runny nose and postnasal drip.

HONEY

Adding a teaspoon or two of honey to herbal tea will help soothe a sore throat—plus, a 2014 review suggests that honey may also ease coughs. "I suggest having honey about an hour before bed," says Sarah Nosal, MD, an assistant professor of family medicine and community health at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City.

IBUPROFEN

Inflammation and the resulting body aches happen when your body fights an infection. Taking ibuprofen reduces swelling in nasal passageways and will help you feel less achy. You can find a bottle of 100 for around $3 at drugstores.

PHOTO: SARAH ANNE WARD. PROP STYLING BY SOPHIA PAPPAS

TECH UPDATE

4 Surprising Things Your TV Can Do

THE AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD in the U.S. has at least one "smart" internet-connected TV, which can have content streamed straight to it. If you have a smart TV in your home, are you taking full advantage of all the great features it has to offer? Check out these amazing skills and start using them today.

1. It Can Respond to Your Voice Commands

Rather than clicking through menus, a lot of TVs now let you control certain functions using your voice—usually through a built-in virtual assistant like Amazon's Alexa (on all Fire TVs) and Google Assistant (available on many models, including Hisense, LG, Samsung, and more). Roku TVs can also be controlled by voice (through a microphone in the remote). Most will let you turn the TV on or off, search for content, pause or rewind, and more.

2. Showcase Your Favorite Photos

Want to show off your latest vacation photos without passing your phone around the room? If you have an iPhone, go to Apple AirPlay Screen Mirroring to have an AirPlay-compatible TV show what's currently on your iPhone's screen. With an Android phone you can "cast" your photos to a TV that's equipped with Google Chromecast by opening the Google Photos app and selecting "Cast."

3. Find Your Misplaced Remote

Some TVs can ring your remote to help you find it. For example, on some Sony models you can click the TV's power button, then select "Find Remote," and the remote will buzz. Some remotes for Roku and Amazon Fire TVs also offer this feature. For example, with Amazon's Alexa Voice Remote Pro for Fire TV, you can say, "Find my remote" to any Amazon device with Alexa or press the "Remote Finder" icon in the Fire TV app's Remote tab.

4. Make Closed Captions Easier to Read

Many TVs let you enlarge the text in closed captions and standard TV menus for easy reading. On Samsung models, this feature is called Zoom Menu and Text. On Sony Google TVs, it's called Text Magnification. Often, the zoom and enlarged text features can be turned on at the same time. (On Samsung models, you can also select "Learn Menu Screen," which audibly tells you about each of the settings and what they do.)

ILLUSTRATION: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: SSPL/GETTY IMAGES (1933 LOW-DENSITY POLYETHYLENE); PATTI MCCONVILLE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (1953 SARAN WRAP); CONSUMER REPORTS (3)

CR Time Traveler PLASTICS

1933 Research by E.W. Fawcett and R.O. Gibson leads to the discovery of low-density polyethylene, the most common plastic in the world. It's used in shampoo bottles, milk cartons, and garbage bags.

1941 Many refrigerators are made with plastic parts instead of metal ones. CR finds that, in general, these fridges cost less and are more efficient.

1953 Saran Wrap, originally developed to protect Army equipment in transit during World War II, hits store shelves as a plastic wrap for American consumers.

1966 We test luggage and find that plastic cases are the most durable type. Wards Safari travel case rates the best of the 18 models we test.

1972 We test dining sets and find that chairs upholstered with plastic-coated fabric are easier to keep clean and are tougher than woven fabric.

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

FACE-OFF

What Makes a Pie Pan Great

BAKING A PIE can be delicate work, and choosing the right pan is essential for success. To find out which type is the best to bake with, CR staffer Jodhaira Rodriguez made the same strawberry pie using pans made from ceramic, glass, aluminized steel, and disposable aluminum foil. She was looking for a golden, flaky crust and a perfectly baked, not-soggy bottom, which held together when sliced into and didn't stick to the pan. Rodriguez used premade refrigerated pie crusts and two cans of strawberry filling in every pan (all the pans we tried were 9 to 10 inches in diameter) and baked them for 45 minutes on the middle rack of an electric oven. She also noted whether the pans were easily scratched. After a full day of baking, she uncovered the winners and losers, at right.

CR'S PICK

Pyrex Easy Grab 9.5-inch Glass Pie Pan $5.50

Pyrex's glass pan took the blue ribbon in our bake-off. It has a wide rim, making it easy to pull out of the oven. The pie had a beautiful golden crust and flaky edges, and the filling held together well when sliced into. None of the crust stuck to the pan. The bottom crust had a nice flaky texture. This pan is dishwasher-safe and didn't show any scratches where we cut the pie with a sharp knife.

RUNNER-UP

USA Pan Bakeware Aluminized Steel Pie Pan, 9-inch $19

This lightweight pan with a wide rim turned out a reasonably good pie. The top was evenly browned, and the bottom crust was flaky. The pan isn't dishwasher-safe but is easy to clean by hand. It showed scratches from the knife.

TOO DELICATE

Farberware Baker's Advantage Ceramic Pie Dish, 9.5-inch $15.50

The pie in this dish had a golden, flaky top crust along the edges, but the center of the pie was soggy. This pan is not dishwasher-safe. While there were no scratches inside after usage, the pretty exterior color did chip off.

LAST PLACE

Heavy Duty 9-inch Disposable Aluminum Foil Pie Tins, 10 pack $11

While this tin is a budget-friendly option, it's also small, holding only 1½ cans of the filling, and flimsy when full. The pie looked great—but was an undercooked mess when we cut into it. Plus, our knife ripped the bottom of the pan.

PHOTOS: SARAH ANNE WARD; PROP STYLING BY SOPHIA PAPPAS (PIES); SHANA NOVAK/GETTY IMAGES (2007 PLASTIC BAG); CONSUMER REPORTS (4)

1980 CR tests 36 glass- and plastic-bottled waters and finds that most using plastic bottles (like Mountain Spring, below), have a slight chemical taste.

1994 In our tests of foils, paper wraps, and plastic wraps, we warn that tiny plastic particles from the products can migrate into food. We advise wrapping cheese and lunch meats in foil instead.

2007 San Francisco becomes the first U.S. city to ban single-use plastic shopping bags.

2021 CR's investigative report "The Big Problem With Plastic" reveals that in 2018, 75.5 percent of plastic ended up in landfills. There, these products break down, and eventually microplastics from them pollute air, water, and soil.

2024 We test food containers made from non-plastic materials to see which maintain the freshness of foods best. This stainless steel set has BPA-free lids and is a CR Smart Buy.

Homearray 10pc Stainless Steel Storage Container Set
$43

97
OVERALL SCORE

For our latest investigation into plastic chemicals in food packaging, turn to page 24.

FOOD IQ™

Which Peanut Butter Tastes Best?

MANY OF US grew up eating classics like Jif or Skippy, but these days you may crave something a little less sweet–and perhaps healthier, too. Just 2 tablespoons of creamy Skippy peanut butter contains half a teaspoon of added sugars and around 150 mg of sodium. Plus, many classic peanut butters are made with hydrogenated vegetable oil, which means they contain saturated fats.

"Natural" peanut butters, on the other hand, typically have no (or fewer) sugars and less salt. And some newer natural-style peanut butters are made with palm oil, which has slightly less saturated fat and, depending on how much is used, often results in a softer texture. We checked out several creamy versions of these natural-style jars and found a winner for every palate.

SWEET WITH A COARSE TEXTURE

Sweet Ella's Organic Smooth Peanut Butter *13 ounces* $8

Made with Spanish peanuts, which gives Sweet Ella's a decidedly sweet taste, it's also more coarsely ground than the other peanut butters here. It separates and needs stirring.

Calories 190
Total fat 16 g, saturated fat 2.5 g, fiber 3 g, added sugars 0 g, protein 8 g, sodium 45 mg

CLOSEST TO CLASSICS LIKE JIF OR SKIPPY

Peanut Butter & Co. Smooth Operator Peanut Butter Spread* *16 ounces* $6

Peanut Butter & Co. is smooth and creamy, and moderately sweet and salty. It has a lot of oil on the surface, so you'll need to do some stirring to get the right texture.

Calories 190
Total fat 15 g, saturated fat 3 g, fiber 2 g, added sugars 2 g, protein 7 g, sodium 100 mg

MILD FLAVOR

Once Again Organic Lightly Sweetened No Stir Creamy Peanut Butter *16 ounces* $8

Once Again has the flavor of lightly roasted peanuts. While it's creamy, it has a slight sandy texture. Needs no stirring.

Calories 190
Total fat 15 g, saturated fat 2.5 g, fiber 3 g, added sugars 1 g, protein 7 g, sodium 65 mg

BIG ROASTED FLAVOR

Santa Cruz Organic No Stir Creamy Dark Roasted Peanut Butter Spread* *16 ounces* $6.50

This is quite smooth and creamy with no oil on top. Rich, with a deep, roasted peanut flavor and a just a hint of salt.

Calories 190
Total fat 17 g, saturated fat 4 g, fiber 3 g, added sugars 0 g, protein 8 g, sodium 50 mg

SAVORY AND SALTY

Adams No-Stir Creamy Peanut Butter *16 ounces* $5

Adams is creamy, salty, and just a little sweet. The sodium count is a bit high at 160 mg, similar to those classic peanut butters. Needs no stirring.

Calories 190
Total fat 16 g, saturated fat 3.5 g, fiber 3 g, added sugars 0 g, protein 8 g, sodium 160 mg

NO SALT AND NO SUGAR

Justin's Classic Peanut Butter Spread* *16 ounces* $6

With just peanuts and palm oil, the fresh, roasted peanut flavor stands out here. Justin's is finely ground with a few coarse, crunchy bits. It needs no stirring to integrate the oil.

Calories 210
Total fat 18 g, saturated fat 3.5 g, fiber 1 g, added sugars 0 g, protein 7 g, sodium 25 mg

Note: Nutrition information is for 2 tablespoons.
*These are called spreads because they contain palm oil instead of hydrogenated oil, and therefore don't meet the Food and Drug Administration's definition of peanut butter.

PHOTO: SARAH ANNE WARD. PROP STYLING BY SOPHIA PAPPAS

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Car Batteries

THE BEST CAR BATTERIES will start your car in all types of weather for three to six years before they need replacing. But even top-rated models weaken over time, leaving you occasionally stranded and in need of a jump-start. High temperatures actually degrade a battery more than low temps. But in the cold, fluids like motor oil become more viscous, making it harder to crank the engine–and that can kill a weak battery. "If you leave the lights on even for a few minutes and the battery goes flat, it's likely time to replace it," says John Ibbotson, CR's chief mechanic. Our ratings, below, can help you find the best models for the size your car needs. There are two types of battery on the market to choose from: a conventional flooded lead-acid battery or an absorbed glass mat (AGM) model. You may want to go with an AGM battery, which, while pricier, lasts longer and won't leak acid.

SIZE 24/24F

BEST

X2Power SLI24FAGMDP $350

TYPE: AGM

97 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 BATTERY LIFE
- 5/5 RESERVE CAPACITY
- 5/5 CCA

BEST VALUE

NAPA Legend Premium 8424F $130

TYPE: CONVENTIONAL

90 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 BATTERY LIFE
- 5/5 RESERVE CAPACITY
- 5/5 CCA

SIZE 35

BEST

Odyssey Extreme Series 35-PC1400T $380

TYPE: CONVENTIONAL

99 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 BATTERY LIFE
- 5/5 RESERVE CAPACITY
- 5/5 CCA

BEST VALUE

Bosch 35-640B $125

TYPE: CONVENTIONAL

85 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 BATTERY LIFE
- 4/5 RESERVE CAPACITY
- 5/5 CCA

SIZE 48

BEST

Odyssey Performance 48-720 $255

TYPE: AGM

91 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 BATTERY LIFE
- 4/5 RESERVE CAPACITY
- 5/5 CCA

BEST VALUE

Exide Marathon Max AGM MXH6L348 $180

TYPE: AGM

85 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 BATTERY LIFE
- 5/5 RESERVE CAPACITY
- 4/5 CCA

SIZE 51R

BEST & BEST VALUE

Duracell 51R $105

TYPE: CONVENTIONAL

81 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 BATTERY LIFE
- 3/5 RESERVE CAPACITY
- 5/5 CCA

BEST AGM

Optima 8073-167 D51R Yellow Top $260

TYPE: AGM

74 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 BATTERY LIFE
- 3/5 RESERVE CAPACITY
- 5/5 CCA

SIZE 65

BEST

Delphi BU9065 MaxStart AGM Premium 65 $200

TYPE: AGM

91 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 BATTERY LIFE
- 5/5 RESERVE CAPACITY
- 5/5 CCA

BEST VALUE

ACDelco Professional Gold 65PG $125

TYPE: CONVENTIONAL

89 OVERALL SCORE

- 5/5 BATTERY LIFE
- 4/5 RESERVE CAPACITY
- 5/5 CCA

ILLUSTRATION: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

WORSE — BETTER

CR RECOMMENDED

HOW WE TEST: Battery life is how well a battery endures repeated charge and discharge cycles; **reserve capacity** is how long a battery can run a car if the charging system fails; **CCA** (cold cranking amps) is how well the battery starts an engine at 0° F.

HEALTH UPDATE

How to Stand Up Straighter

HAS MAINTAINING good posture become more of a challenge for you lately? A hunched-over, forward-leaning stance—called hyperkyphosis—does become more common with age. About 20 to 40 percent of people older than age 60 and 55 percent of people over 70 have a difficult time standing up straight. Plus, technology may be making your posture worse: 46 percent of adults in the U.S. spend 5 to 6 hours a day looking at their cell phones, and 11 percent do so for 7 or more hours (all outside of offices). "Computers and texting encourage a forward head position and make it harder to maintain good posture," says Lynne Hughes, PhD, PT, an associate professor in the department of physical therapy at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. If hunching over interferes with your ability to do daily tasks, it's best to see your doctor to check for any bone- or spine-related issues. But you may be able to improve posture on your own with just a few moves, performed daily.

› **Move your shoulders.** If you're spending time seated in a forward or rounded position, get up for a minute or two every 30 to 60 minutes. "Do some shoulder circles, shoulder squeezes [bringing your shoulder blades together], or chin tucks, pulling your chin toward your spine," Hughes says.

› **Build up your strength.** Experts recommend doing at least two strength workouts a week. Using light weights (just 2 or 3 pounds to start), try doing a seated row: Holding your dumbbells, sit in a chair with arms at your sides extended. Lean forward as far as possible from the hips. Squeeze shoulder blades, bend elbows, and pull hands toward hips, elbows pointing behind you. Then slowly release. Check out **CR.org/buildstrength** for more exercises.

› **Practice straighter posture.** Try this pose to help achieve proper upper-back alignment:

1. Stand with your head, shoulders, upper back, buttocks, and heels (if you can) against a wall, and imagine a cord attached to the top of your head, gently pulling you upward. Hold for 30 seconds, relax, and repeat three times daily.

2. Another option: Lie on your back on the floor or on a firm bed for 20 minutes a day with a rolled towel or pool noodle between your shoulder blades. Place a pillow under your head if you find that lying completely flat is too difficult.

PRACTICE "WALL ANGELS"

1. Stand with your back against a wall with your feet shoulder width apart.

2. Place the back of your elbows, forearms, and wrists against the wall so that your bent elbows are in line with your shoulders.

3. Slowly slide your arms up above your head, and then back down to shoulder height, all while keeping your elbows in contact with the wall.

4. Repeat 10 times.

USE DEVICES AT EYE LEVEL

Looking down at screens stresses your neck muscles and ligaments. Instead, hold your phone at eye level when you text.

ILLUSTRATIONS: JASON SCHNEIDER

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

Toyota RAV4

TOYOTA RAV4 SUVs

Toyota is recalling 1,853,568 2013-2018 RAV4 SUVs because some 12-volt replacement batteries have smaller top dimensions than the original battery and may not be properly secured. If the hold-down clamp isn't tightened correctly for the smaller size, the battery could move during aggressive driving, enabling the positive battery terminal to contact the clamp and short-circuit, risking fire.
What to do: Toyota dealerships will replace the parts at no charge. Owners may call Toyota customer support at 800-331-4331. The NHTSA number for this recall is 23V734.

INSIGNIA PRESSURE COOKERS

Best Buy is recalling about 930,000 Insignia pressure cookers because the cooker has incorrect volume markings on the inner pot. This can cause users to overfill the pot, and hot food and liquids to be ejected when the pressure cooker is vented or opened, posing a burn hazard. The pressure cookers were sold at Best Buy stores nationwide and online at Amazon and bestbuy.com from October 2017 through June 2023 for $50 to $120.
What to do: Stop using the cooker. Contact Best Buy at 888-359-4485 for details and to get free replacement parts.

LITTLE SLEEPIES LOVEYS AND BANDANA BIBS

Little Sleepies is recalling about 450,000 Sleepyhead loveys and bandana bibs because the care instruction label on them can detach, posing a choking hazard to young children. The products were sold online at littlesleepies.com and at boutique stores nationwide from February 2021 through September 2023 for $12 to $48.
What to do: Take the lovey and bib away from children and remove the care instruction label to eliminate the hazard, or return the products using prepaid shipping from the company for a full refund. Call Little Sleepies at 866-330-3353 or go to littlesleepies.com for details.

LOCHINVAR BOILERS

Lochinvar is recalling about 17,370 Lochinvar, A.O. Smith, and State Industries brand condensing residential boilers because the boiler's flue collector can crack if exposed to a high-impact event in the burner chamber, which can allow the boiler to emit carbon monoxide, posing a risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. The boilers were sold at independent contractors, plumbers, and plumbing supply vendors and distributors from August 2021 through September 2023 for $4,000 to $10,000, including installation. A limited number were sold to original equipment manufacturers who modify and use the boilers in integrated in-floor heating systems.
What to do: Contact the installer or a qualified technician to schedule a free repair. The repair will consist of installing a steel reinforcement plate. Consumers who continue use of the boilers while awaiting repair should have working carbon monoxide alarms outside of sleeping areas and on each floor of the home. Lochinvar's toll-free number is 833-232-9706.

IKEA LETTAN MIRRORS

Ikea is recalling about 14,600 Lettan mirrors because the plastic fittings that attach the mirror to the wall can break, causing the mirror to fall, posing a laceration hazard. (About 22,400 were previously recalled in March 2023.) The mirrors were sold at Ikea stores nationwide and online at ikea.com from December 2019 through June 2023 for $23 to $56.
What to do: Take down the mirror and contact Ikea at 888-966-4532 or go to ikea.com for details and to order a free set of replacement wall fittings and instructions. Alternatively, you can return the mirror to any Ikea store for a full refund (proof of purchase is not required).

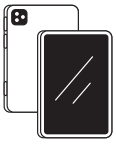
STYLE SELECTIONS ELECTRIC FIREPLACES

Twin-Star International is recalling about 14,670 Style Selections 42-inch-wide infrared quartz electric fireplaces because the fireplace can overheat, posing a fire hazard. The fireplaces were sold at Lowe's stores nationwide and online at lowes.com from September 2021 through January 2023 for about $200.
What to do: Unplug the fireplace and call Twin-Star at 855-884-9651 or go to twinstarhome.com for details and to get a refund. Complete the online recall registration form at twinstarhome.com/recall.

PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS. ICONS: RODRIGO DAMANTI

FEBRUARY IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

TABLETS



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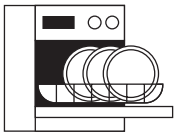
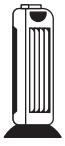


SPACE HEATERS



SNOW BLOWERS

PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

Vacuuming Just Got a Lot Easier

Upright or canister? Stick vac or handheld? Maybe a robovac? Here's what you need to speed through this annoying household job.

by Mary H.J. Farrell

UPRIGHT
SHARK VERTEX DUOCLEAN AZ2002
$480
75
OVERALL SCORE

CANISTER
KENMORE 200 SERIES BC4002
$250
76
OVERALL SCORE

CORDLESS
MIELE TRIFLEX HX1 FACELIFT SMUL1 $600
77
OVERALL SCORE

LET'S BE HONEST: Vacuuming may never be a task you look forward to. But the newest upright and canister models in our ratings can at least help you get the job done faster and better. They have high-powered suction that excels at grabbing grit from hardwood floors and eliminating embedded dirt from carpet. They come with tools that yank pet hair out of crevices and shoo dust bunnies from under your furniture. And they boast convenient, adjustable features that make them more versatile and easier to use. They've also become better at sealing all of the dust they pick up inside their collection canister or bag, which is great news for allergy sufferers. Even more good news: The last few years have brought big improvements to stick, handheld, and robotic models, so you can still get some surface cleaning done without pulling out your big machine. Prices have come down, too (even on robotics). If you've been considering adding a lightweight second vacuum to your cleaning toolkit, now could be a good time to buy. But your first decision should be about your main vacuum.

Start With a Full-Sized Upright or Canister

CR's experts have found that these are the best picker-uppers for everything from embedded dirt to piles of pet hair. Which type should you use? Each has its pros and cons. Here's what to know.

UPRIGHTS

If your home has a lot of carpet and rugs, you might want an upright. "With the full weight of the vacuum sitting over the power brush, you can more easily push it down into the carpet pile to suck up the debris caught deep down," says Frank Rizzi, a senior lab technician for CR. Our top models also excel on bare floors, so an upright could do everything you need.

They're also a good choice if you have limited storage space because the compact design takes up less room than a canister. One important note: While the uprights in our ratings start at just 10 pounds, the ones that do the best job of cleaning weigh about twice that much, so they can be difficult to lift–a potential deal breaker if you live in a multistory home. If you want an upright but have stairs, consider models from Shark, including the Vertex DuoClean AZ2002 (on the facing page) that can convert to a convenient-to-carry canister setup. Also, some vacuums are just easier to maneuver than others. See the handling scores in the ratings on page 22 to find them.

CANISTERS

If your home has a lot of hardwood, vinyl, or tile, consider a canister. They excel at sucking up dirt from bare floors and along edges where the floor meets walls. Top models like the Miele Complete C3 Marin, $1,300, and the Kenmore 200 Series BC4002 (on the facing page), clean carpet well, too.

Canisters are also the best choice when you live in a multilevel home. They're not exactly lightweight (they range from about 15 to 27 pounds), but their two-part design makes them easier to carry. They also have long hoses and cleaning wands that let you reach under furniture without having to switch to an extension wand attachment like you do with an upright.

Upright or canister, pick a model with high scores for the type of flooring in most of your home. Also look at the airflow score in our ratings. This measure of how well the appliance maintains suction while you're using cleaning tools is the key to fewer clogs.

When a Second Vacuum Can Help

If you have a top-performing upright or canister, you don't really need a second vacuum. Those models can handle all kinds of dirt and come with tools to get into cracks and corners. But when you don't need in-depth cleaning, you only have a small mess, or you don't want to carry a larger vacuum up or down stairs, a stick or handheld could do the trick.

STICK VACS

These lightweight tools (most weigh under 10 pounds) are much more powerful than they used to be. But their cleaning prowess still can't match an upright or canister (especially on carpet), so they're better for targeted tasks. That said, they're good enough that if you live in a small space with mostly hard-surface floors, a top model like the corded Shark Vertex Ultralight HZ2002, $260, or the cordless Miele Triflex HX2, $750, could suit your needs.

Two caveats: We don't give any cordless sticks the CR Recommended designation because our members cite frustrations with diminishing batteries. So look for one that comes with an extra battery or that you can buy one for. Also, know that one charge allows 10 to 15 minutes of high cleaning power.

HANDHELDS

These highly portable vacuums are a quick way to clean up spills (like coffee grounds and flour) or debris in tough spots (in your car, for example). The best in our tests, like the Shark Ion WI WV201, $130, and the Black+Decker DustBuster CHV140L, $90, work well on carpeted or hard surfaces and weigh under 3 pounds. Some stick vacuums (like the Samsung Bespoke Jet VS28C9762UK/AA, $900) convert into handheld vacuums, so you can get both quick pickup tools in one.

PHOTO, PROP STYLING BY SOPHIA PAPPAS

PHOTOGRAPH BY SARAH ANNE WARD

CAN A ROBOVAC REPLACE A CANISTER OR UPRIGHT?

THE ANSWER? NOT YET. Performance has improved enough to make robotic models adequate for light routine cleaning, but they can only clear away surface dirt. They won't get down into the fibers of carpet and rugs, and some can scatter dirt around on hard floors. But prices have come way down (by as much as half). They can be handy helpers between deep-cleaning sessions with a regular vacuum—and it's fun to watch them work while you do something more enjoyable.

There is a bit of a learning curve with robotics. While our top models can maneuver their way around obstacles like extension cords and slip under furniture, some can't. So you'll have to prep the room by removing small items like shoes and pet toys from the floor before sending your vac out on a cleaning mission. While most—if not all—units allow for manual control via the device itself, for a more optimized and personalized performance, using the app paired with the vacuum is recommended because it gives you access to controls for things like mapping a room and choosing a cleaning pattern.

Worried about data security? CR's testers have found that robovacs don't cause as many concerns as other smart devices. Still, we think manufacturers could adopt more robust security measures. After all, it's a bot with a camera connected to the internet mapping your house. If you're not comfortable with that, don't buy one that uses a camera to navigate.

IROBOT ROOMBA I4+ EVO $520

76 OVERALL SCORE

EUFY 11S $230

70 OVERALL SCORE

SHARK AI ULTRA RV2610WA $450

72 OVERALL SCORE

IROBOT ROOMBA 675 (TARGET) $280

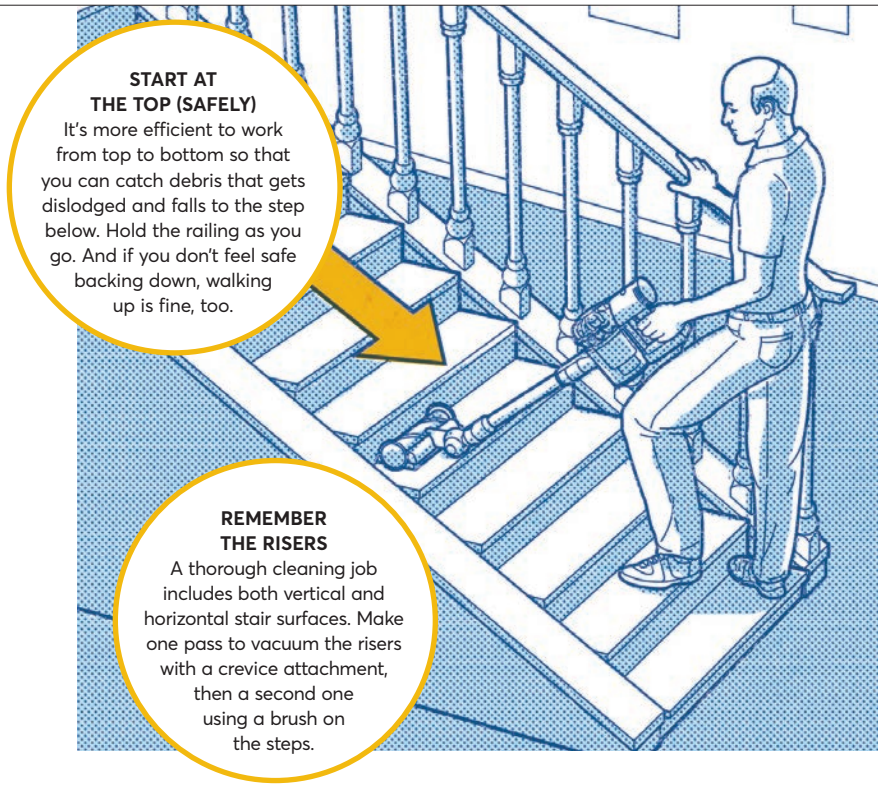
73 OVERALL SCORE

The Safer, Better Way to Clean Your Stairs

WITH THE EXCEPTION of the pesky cobwebs that gather in the corners of your ceilings, stairs may be the most challenging place to vacuum. Hauling a heavy appliance up and down is no picnic, and the cord poses a tripping hazard.

While uprights are the vacuum of choice for carpeted floors, they're difficult—and possibly unsafe—to maneuver on stairs. Canisters are a bit less clunky because you can hold the hose and brush in one hand and prop the body up vertically on a landing or stair as you work. "To ensure stability while cleaning, consider placing one foot on one step and the other on the next. This approach offers enhanced support and balance," says Juan Alberto Arguello, PhD, CR's program leader for product safety and sustainability. "Keep track of the hose and the cord, wear the right type of shoes—no sandals or flip-flops—and be aware of the transition from step to step."

A cordless stick vac may be a better bet. They're light and don't have a cord to get tangled up in. Plus, "most convert to hand-vac mode, so you get power plus the versatility of a handheld," says Susan Booth, CR's vacuum project leader. Whichever you choose, here's how to get the grit off your stairs.

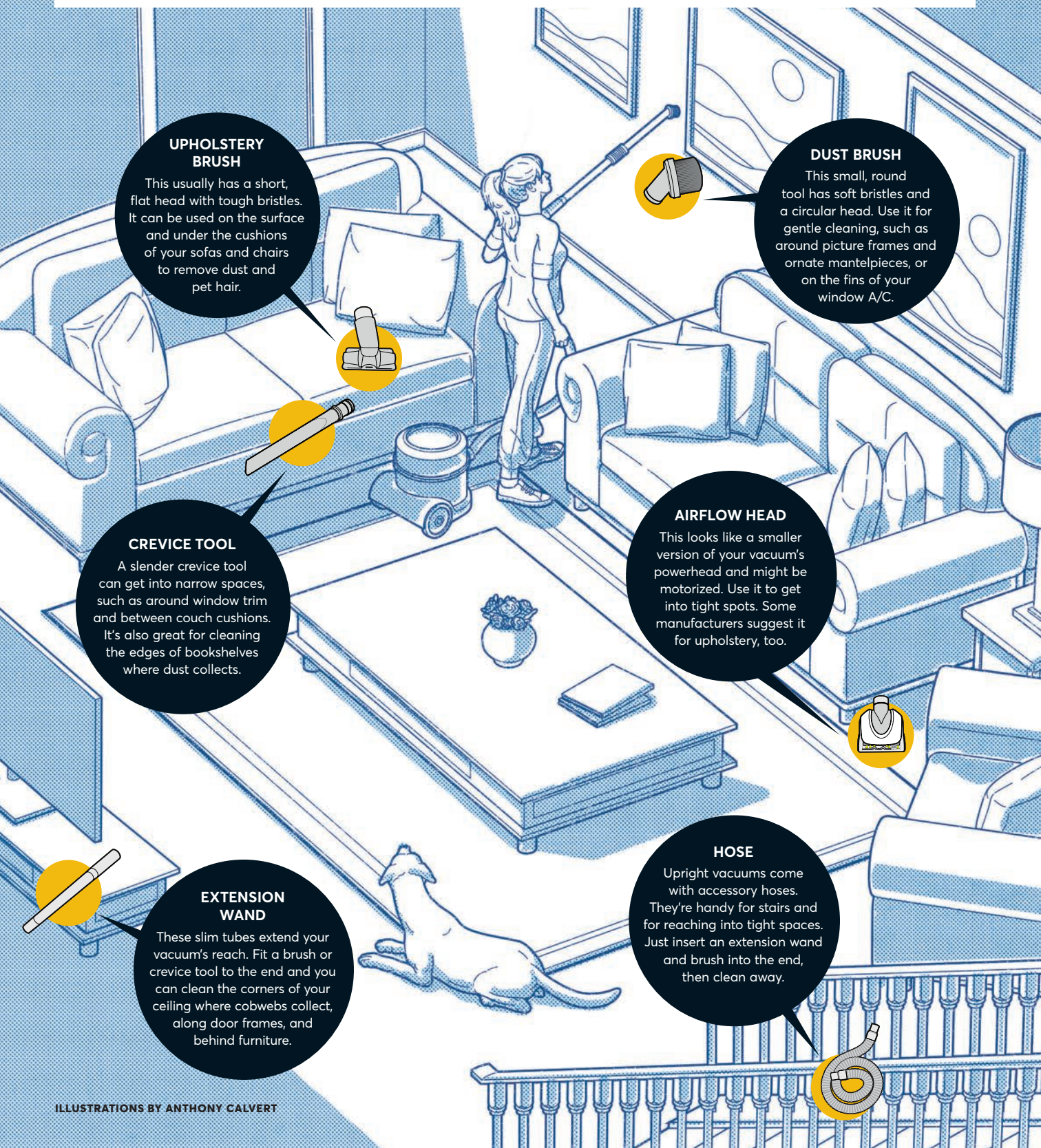

START AT THE TOP (SAFELY)
It's more efficient to work from top to bottom so that you can catch debris that gets dislodged and falls to the step below. Hold the railing as you go. And if you don't feel safe backing down, walking up is fine, too.
REMEMBER THE RISERS
A thorough cleaning job includes both vertical and horizontal stair surfaces. Make one pass to vacuum the risers with a crevice attachment, then a second one using a brush on the steps.

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS, MANUFACTURERS. ATTACHMENTS: CHRIS PHILPOT

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

Get to Know Your Vacuum's Attachments

ALMOST ALL UPRIGHT and canister vacuums come with a variety of attachments—extra brushes, hoses, and other tools—to make it easier to clean more than just the floor. If yours came without attachments, you can probably order them from the manufacturer's website. "These tools are meant to help clean different surfaces and difficult-to-reach spaces," says Frank Rizzi, who conducts Consumer Reports' vacuum tests. He adds that some brands offer specialized attachments, like pet hair power brushes and flexible crevice tools. Before you buy a new vacuum, check to see if the attachments it comes with fit your needs.



UPHOLSTERY BRUSH
This usually has a short, flat head with tough bristles. It can be used on the surface and under the cushions of your sofas and chairs to remove dust and pet hair.

DUST BRUSH
This small, round tool has soft bristles and a circular head. Use it for gentle cleaning, such as around picture frames and ornate mantelpieces, or on the fins of your window A/C.

CREVICE TOOL
A slender crevice tool can get into narrow spaces, such as around window trim and between couch cushions. It's also great for cleaning the edges of bookshelves where dust collects.

AIRFLOW HEAD
This looks like a smaller version of your vacuum's powerhead and might be motorized. Use it to get into tight spots. Some manufacturers suggest it for upholstery, too.

EXTENSION WAND
These slim tubes extend your vacuum's reach. Fit a brush or crevice tool to the end and you can clean the corners of your ceiling where cobwebs collect, along door frames, and behind furniture.

HOSE
Upright vacuums come with accessory hoses. They're handy for stairs and for reaching into tight spaces. Just insert an extension wand and brush into the end, then clean away.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANTHONY CALVERT

Ratings › **Cleanup Crew** The best vacuums in our tests can handle household messes large or small, work well on carpet and bare floors, keep allergens under control—and even pick up pet hair.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results							Features							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Carpet	Bare floors	Hose suction	Clean emissions	Handling	Pet hair	Noise	Weight (lb.)	Cord length (ft.)	Brush on/off	Easy on/off	Manual-pile adjust	Suction control	Full bag/bin indicator	High efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter
BAGGED UPRIGHT VACUUMS																			
Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly 31150	77	$350	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	21	35	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kenmore BU1018	75	$350	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▼	21	30		●	●	●	●	●
Kirby Avalir 2	74	$1,600	▲	▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▼	▲▲	▼	23	29	●	●	●	●		
Kenmore Pet Friendly 31140	73	$280	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	20	29	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hoover WindTunnel Max UH30600	69	$200	●	▼	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	●	17	29	●	●	●		●	
Kenmore Intuition BU4050	69	$180	●	●	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	15	30	●			●	●	●
BAGLESS UPRIGHT VACUUMS																			
Shark Stratos AZ3002	77	$500	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	17	30		●		●	●	●
Shark Vertex DuoClean AZ2002	75	$480	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	17	30		●		●	●	●
Shark Navigator Professional NV360	74	$220	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▼	▲▲	▲	14	25	●			●	●	●
Kenmore Pet Friendly CrossOver 31220	73	$250	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	18	29	●			●	●	●
Shark Rotator Professional Lift-Away NV501	73	$260	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲	17	30	●			●	●	●
Dyson Ball Animal 2	73	$450	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	17	30	●				●	●
Dyson Ball Multi Floor 2	73	$400	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▼	16	31	●				●	●
Kenmore AllergenSeal DU2012	73	$130	●	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	15	30	●			●	●	●
Shark Navigator Professional Lift-Away NV356E	72	$250	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	●	●	16	30	●			●	●	●
Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly CrossOver Ultra 31230	72	$350	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	18	35	●			●	●	●
Shark Navigator Lift-Away NV352	72	$200	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	●	●	14	25	●			●	●	●
BAGGED CANISTER VACUUMS																			
Miele Complete C3 Marin	84	$1,300	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	23	24	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly UltraPlush 81714	76	$530	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	25	26	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly CrossOver 21814	76	$500	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▼	▲	●	26	27	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kenmore Pop-N-Go BC4026	76	$320	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲	22	26	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kenmore 200 Series BC4002	76	$250	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	●	19	24	●	●	●	●		●
Kenmore Pop-N-Go UltraPlush BC4027	74	$400	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	21	26	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kenmore 400 Series 81414	73	$330	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	●	●	▲▲	●	19	25	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kenmore 200 Series 81214	72	$260	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	●	19	24	●	●	●	●		●
BAGLESS CANISTER VACUUMS																			
Miele Blizzard CX1 Cat & Dog	75	$1,000	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	15	21	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kenmore 22614	72	$350	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▼	▲▲	●	23	24	●	●	●	●	●	●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features					
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Carpet	Bare floors	Edges	Noise	Pet hair	Clean emissions	Run time (min.)	Charge time (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Cord length (ft.)	Battery type	Brush on/off
CORDED STICK VACUUMS																
✓ **Shark** Vertex Ultralight HZ2002	76	$260	⏫	🔼	➖	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	➖	NA	NA	9.0	30	NA	
✓ **Shark** Rocket HV322	75	$230	⏫	🔼	➖	🔼	➖	🔼	⏫	🔼	NA	NA	9.2	30	NA	
✓ **Shark** Rocket HV302	73	$180	⏫	🔼	➖	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	NA	NA	8.7	30	NA	
CORDLESS STICK VACUUMS																
Samsung Bespoke Jet VS28C9762UK/AA	81	$900	–	–	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	47	6	7.0	NA	25.2 lithium ion	
Miele Triflex HX2	77	$750	–	–	➖	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	17	4	8.0	NA	lithium ion	
Miele Triflex HX1 Facelift SMUL1	77	$600	–	–	➖	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	25	4	8.0	NA	lithium ion	
Shark Vertex Pro IZ662H	75	$450	➖	🔼	➖	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	35	4	8.9	NA	lithium ion	
Shark Stratos IZ862H	75	$500	➖	🔼	➖	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	40	4	8.9	NA	25.2v lithium ion	
Dyson Outsize+	72	$900	🔽	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	38	5	7.8	NA	25.2 lithium ion	
Dyson V15 Detect+ Cordless	71	$750	🔽	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	35	5	7.1	NA	25.2 lithium Ion	
Hoover ONEPWR Blade Max BH53350	71	$350	➖	➖	➖	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	23	4	5.6	NA	20.0 volt lithium ion	
Dyson Gen5detect	71	$950	🔽	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	35	5	7.6	NA	36v lithium ion	
Tineco Pure One S12	71	$600	–	–	➖	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	17	4	6.6	NA	21.6 volt lithium ion	
Dyson Gen5outsize	70	$1,050	🔽	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	36	5	8.5	NA	36v lithium ion	
Miele Triflex HX1 SMUL0	70	$500	–	–	🔽	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	24	4	8.0	NA	lithium ion	
Dyson V11 Outsize	69	$800	🔽	🔼	➖	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	41	5	7.9	NA	25.2 volt lithium ion	
Dyson V15 Detect	69	$700	🔽	🔼	➖	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	35	5	6.85	NA	25.2 lithium ion	
Shark Vertex Ultra IZ462H	68	$350	➖	🔼	🔽	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	30	3	9.0	NA	lithium Ion	
Dyson V8 Absolute	67	$500	🔽	🔼	➖	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	21	5	5.6	NA	21.6 volt lithium ion	
Tineco A10-D Plus	66	$150	–	–	🔽	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	17	4	4.99	NA	22.2V li-Ion	
Ryobi One+ 18V P7181K	66	$230	➖	➖	🔽	⏫	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	25	2	7.6	NA	lithium ion	●
Shark Rocket Pro IZ140	65	$250	➖	🔼	🔽	⏫	🔽	⏫	⏫	➖	19	3	7.7	NA	21.6 volt lithium ion	
Dyson V12 Detect Slim Absolute	65	$650	🔽	🔼	➖	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	36	4	5.2	NA	25.2 lithium Ion	

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/vacuums.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Predicted reliability** estimates the likelihood that newly purchased models from a given brand will develop problems or break within the first five years. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend the vacuum they bought. In cases where we have insufficient survey data, indicated by a gray dash (–), we give the model weighted category average reliability and satisfaction scores. In our performance tests for uprights and canisters, we lift embedded sand from medium-pile carpet and suck up sand from bare floors. We use the same carpet test for stick vacs and use cereal, rice, and sand for bare floors. We use fine wood flour to see whether tools and attachments can maintain airflow and also to gauge emissions—how much dust the vacuum spews back into the air. **Noise** is based on measurements in decibels. **Handling** reflects how easy it is to push, pull, and carry the vacuum. **Pet hair** reflects how well the vacuum picks it up from medium-pile carpet. **Price** is approximate retail.

How to Eat

CR tested popular fast foods and supermarket staples for some of the chemicals used to make

by LAUREN F. FRIEDMAN photograph by SARAH ANNE WARD

Less Plastic

plastic, which can be harmful to your health. Here's what we found—and how to stay safer.

By the time you open a container of yogurt, the food has taken a long journey to reach your spoon. You may have some idea of that journey: From cow to processing to packaging to store shelves. But at each step, there is a chance for a little something extra to sneak in, a stowaway of sorts that shouldn't be there.

That unexpected ingredient is something called a plasticizer: a chemical used to make plastic more flexible and durable. Today, plasticizers—the most common of which are called phthalates—show up inside almost all of us, right along with other chemicals found in plastic, such as bisphenols like BPA. These have been linked to a long list of health concerns, even at very low levels.

Consumer Reports has investigated bisphenols and phthalates in food and food packaging a few times over the past 25 years. In our new tests, we checked a wider variety of foods to see how much of the chemicals Americans actually consume.

The answer? Quite a lot. Our tests of nearly 100 foods found that despite growing evidence of potential health threats, bisphenols and phthalates remain widespread in our food.

The findings on phthalates are particularly concerning: We found them in almost every food we tested, often at high levels. The levels did not depend on packaging type, and no one particular type of food—say, dairy products or prepared meals—was more likely than another to have them.

For example, we found high levels in, among other products, Del Monte sliced peaches, Chicken of the Sea pink salmon, Fairlife Core Power high-protein chocolate milkshakes, Yoplait Original French vanilla low-fat yogurt, and several fast foods, including Wendy's crispy chicken nuggets, a Chipotle chicken burrito, and a Burger King Whopper with cheese. Organic products were just as problematic: In fact, the highest phthalate levels we found were in a can of Annie's Organic cheesy ravioli.

Yet some products had much lower levels than others. A serving of Pizza Hut's Original Cheese Pan Pizza, for example, had half the phthalate levels of a similar pizza from Little Caesars. Levels varied even among products from the same brand: Chef Boyardee Big Bowl Beefaroni pasta in meat sauce had less than half the level of the company's Beefaroni pasta in tomato and meat sauce.

"That tells us that, as widespread as these chemicals are, there are ways to reduce how much is in our foods," says James E. Rogers, PhD, who oversees product safety testing at CR.

The trouble is, there are so many ways these chemicals enter our food.

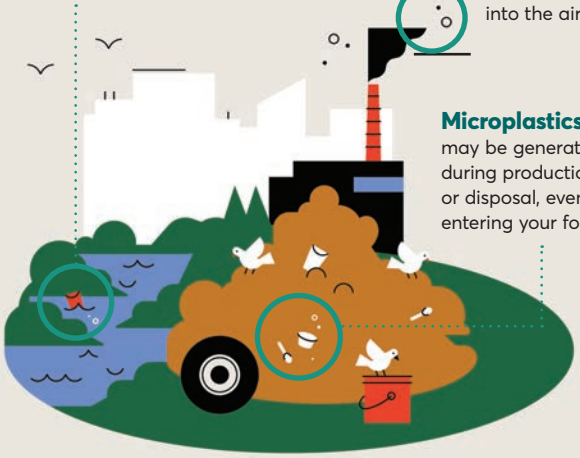
HOW PLASTIC CHEMICALS GET INTO FOOD

ENVIRONMENT

Plastic trash in landfills can degrade, allowing chemicals to leach into water and soil.

Incineration and production of plastic can release chemicals into the air.

Microplastics may be generated during production, use, or disposal, eventually entering your food.

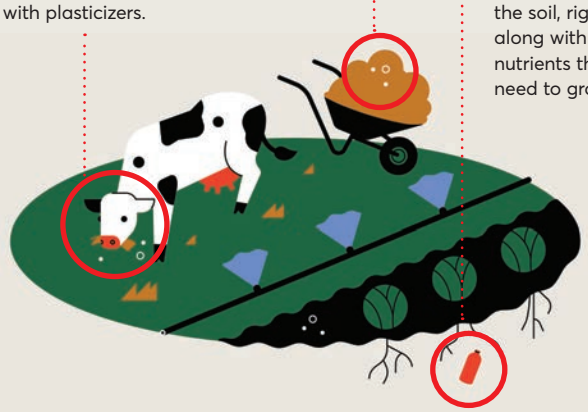


AGRICULTURE

Plastic mulch is sometimes used to suppress the growth of weeds, then plowed right into the fields.

Animals such as cows may consume water and plants contaminated with plasticizers.

Plants can drink up plasticizers from the soil, right along with the nutrients they need to grow.



Early efforts to limit exposure to them focused on packaging, but it's now clear that phthalates in particular can also get in from the plastic in the tubing, conveyor belts, and gloves used during food processing, and can even enter directly into meat and produce via contaminated water and soil.

There are few regulations restricting the use of these chemicals in food production, or requiring that manufacturers test foods for them. But our guide can help you learn how plasticizers get into your food, how to reduce your exposure, and how key changes by industry and regulators could make our food safer.

PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD: PROP STYLING BY SOPHIA PAPPAS

The Problem With Plastic Chemicals

Bisphenols and phthalates in our food are concerning for several reasons.

To start, growing research shows that they are endocrine disruptors, which means that they can interfere with the production and regulation of estrogen and other hormones. Even minor disruptions in hormone levels can contribute to an increased risk of several health problems, including diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, birth defects, premature birth, neurodevelopmental disorders, and infertility.

Those problems typically develop slowly, sometimes over decades, says Philip Landrigan, MD, a pediatrician and the director of the Program for Global Public Health and the Common Good at Boston College. "Unlike a plane crash, where everyone dies at once, the people who die from these die over many years."

Another concern is that with plastic so ubiquitous in food and elsewhere, the chemicals can't be completely avoided. And though the human body is pretty good at eliminating bisphenols and phthalates from our systems, our constant exposure to them means that they enter our blood and tissue almost as quickly as they're eliminated. And plasticizers in particular can easily leach out of plastic and other materials. In addition, the chemicals' harmful effects may be cumulative, so steady exposure to even very small amounts over time could increase health risks.

All that makes it difficult to trace any particular bad health outcome—say, a heart attack or breast cancer—to the chemicals. And it makes it hard for regulators to set a limit for what is considered safe for any food. "As a first step, the key is to determine how widespread the chemicals are in our food supply," Rogers says. "Then we can develop strategies, as a society and individually, to limit our exposure."

High Risks Even at Low Levels

To help figure out the scope of the problem, CR tested a wide range of food items, in a variety of packaging.

PROCESSING
PACKAGING
Pasteurization
requires high temperatures that may speed up leaching.
Flexible plastic tubing
may be used in the processing of milk and oils.
Vinyl gloves
can contain more than one-third plasticizers by weight.
Conveyor belts,
which move food as it's processed, may be plasticized.
Bisphenols
can show up in food packaging, including lined metal cans.
Plasticizers
may be found in plastic wraps and jar gaskets.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE TOM AGENCY

Specifically, we tested 85 foods, analyzing two or three samples of each. We looked for common bisphenols and phthalates, as well as some chemicals that are used to replace them. (For more information on these chemical substitutes, see "Why Chemical Substitutes May Not Be Better," on page 30.) We included prepared meals, fruits and vegetables, milk and other dairy products, baby food, fast food, meat, and seafood, all packaged in cans, pouches, foil, or other material.

The news on BPA and other bisphenols was somewhat reassuring: While we detected them in 79 percent of the tested samples, levels were notably lower than when we last tested for BPA, in 2009, "suggesting that we are at least moving in the right direction on bisphenols," says CR's Rogers.

But there wasn't any good news on phthalates: We found them in all but one food (Polar raspberry lime seltzer). And the levels were much higher than for bisphenols.

Determining an acceptable level for these chemicals in food is tricky. Regulators in the U.S. and Europe have set thresholds for only bisphenol A (BPA) and a few phthalates, and none of the foods CR tested had amounts exceeding those limits.

But "many of these thresholds do not reflect the most current scientific knowledge, and may not protect against all the potential health effects," says Tunde Akinleye, the CR scientist who oversaw CR's tests. "We don't feel comfortable saying these levels are okay," he says. "They're not."

The decision to allow these chemicals in food "is not evidence-based," says Ami Zota, ScD, an associate professor of environmental health sciences at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health in New York City, who has studied the risks of phthalates.

For example, one of the most well-studied phthalates is called DEHP. Studies have linked it to insulin resistance, high blood pressure, reproductive issues, early menopause, and other concerns at levels well below the limits set by American and European regulators. It was the most common phthalate that we found in our tests, with more than half of the products we tested having levels above what research has linked to health problems.

In addition, Akinleye says that with exposure to these chemicals coming from so many sources—not only food but also other products, such as printed receipts and household dust—it's difficult to quantify what a "safe" limit would be for a single food. "The more we learn about these chemicals, including how widespread they are, the more it seems clear that they can harm us even at very low levels," he says.

Making Food Safer

Growing concerns about the health risks posed by these chemicals have led U.S. regulators to meaningfully curtail the use of these chemicals in a number of products—but not yet food.

For example, the federal government has banned eight phthalates in children's toys. But—with the exception of a 2012 ban on BPA in baby bottles (extended in 2013 to infant formula cans)—there are no substantive limits on plastic-related chemicals in food packaging or production. Just last year the Food and Drug Administration rejected a petition from multiple groups calling for a ban on more than two dozen phthalates used in materials that come into contact with food.

An FDA spokesperson told CR that in 2022 it asked the food industry and others to provide the agency with additional data about the use of plasticizers in any material that comes into contact with food during production, and might use that information to update its safety assessments of the chemicals.

CR's food safety scientists and others say such a reassessment by the FDA and other agencies is overdue and essential.

Supermarket and fast-food chains, as well as food manufacturers, should also be required to take action, Rogers says, and should set specific goals for reducing and eliminating bisphenols and phthalates from all food packaging and processing equipment throughout their supply chains.

CR contacted certain companies in our tests that had products with the highest phthalate levels per serving, and asked them to comment on our results. Annie's, Burger King, Fairlife, Little Caesars, Moe's Southwest Grill, Wendy's, and Yoplait did not respond to our requests for comment.

Del Monte, Gerber, and McDonald's emphasized that they abide by existing regulations. Gerber added that it requires its suppliers to certify that its food packaging is free of BPA and phthalates. Chicken of the Sea said it requires its suppliers to certify that neither products nor packaging has intentionally added BPA or phthalates, but it acknowledged that fish live in water that is often polluted with phthalates.

More chemical companies need to step up, too, by creating safer, more sustainable materials. "We want things to be functional, but also nontoxic and biodegradable and renewable," says Hanno Erythropel, PhD, at the Center for Green Chemistry and Green Engineering at Yale University in New Haven, Conn.

That may be tough, he acknowledges, but it should be possible: An entire field called green chemistry is working to develop just these sorts of alternatives.

In the meantime, see the facing page for tips on what you can do now to limit your exposure to these chemicals in your food, and elsewhere.

Less Plastic in Your Food …

Limiting exposure to phthalates isn't as simple as avoiding particular types of packaging, because these chemicals can enter your food long before it is packaged. The best solution, says Maricel Maffini, PhD, a chemical safety expert and the author of a recent study of phthalate risks, would be for manufacturers and regulators to ensure that our food was safe, so we wouldn't "have to make these decisions when we go to the grocery store." But that doesn't mean you're powerless now. Reducing your overall exposure to the chemicals in plastic—including bisphenols and phthalates—may help you avoid some of the risks. These six steps can help.

Avoid plastic food storage containers.

If you do use them, don't heat them in the microwave, and avoid using them to store hot food, because heat can increase leaching. You can see CR's top picks for glass and steel food storage containers at **CR.org/foodstorage**. And keep your food below the top of the container to avoid contact with the lids, which are often plastic.

Steer clear of fast foods.

Plasticizers are one more reason to limit consumption of fast food. Our testing found some of the highest levels of phthalates and phthalate substitutes in fast food. Although we can't say exactly why, one possible explanation is that fast foods are often prepared by people wearing vinyl gloves, which are known to be extremely high in these chemicals.

Limit high-fat foods.

Another reason fast foods may be high in plasticizers is that they tend to be fatty, and some research has found higher levels of plasticizers—many of which are known to be fat-soluble—in foods with higher fat content. One 2020 review, for example, reported that levels of DEHP were often almost five to 10 times higher in cream than they were in milk.

Eat fresh, minimally processed food.

Make sure your diet includes plenty of unpackaged fruits and vegetables, which have fewer chances to have contact with phthalates. A study based on 2013 to 2014 data found that people who ate more ultraprocessed foods—such as french fries and ice cream pops—had higher levels of certain phthalate byproducts in their urine.

Choose wood, stainless steel, and silicone for kitchen tools.

Chopping on a plastic cutting board can generate microplastics, so consider a wood or silicone board instead. Some plastic uses are probably riskier than others—dumping hot food into a plastic bowl and using plastic wrap for leftovers may expose you more than giving your lettuce a quick dry in a plastic salad spinner, for example.

Use water bottles made of glass or steel.

Avoid plastic bottles and cups, which are often made with bisphenols. Carrying around your own stainless steel straws can also make it easy to say no to plastic straws. As a bonus, you'll reduce the amount of trash you generate.

… And in Your World

Food is not the only way you're exposed to bisphenols and phthalates, so if you want to reduce your exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals, you have to think broadly. Phthalates, for example, which are a viscous liquid in their raw form, are also a common ingredient in perfumes, cleansers, shampoos, and other cosmetics, and are sometimes used in flooring and furniture. Bisphenols and phthalates are also often found in household dust. Here are a few smart steps you can take.

Go fragrance-free.

Soap, cosmetics, and cleaners with fragrances often use phthalates, especially DEP, as a solvent.

Open your windows.

Because phthalates can be used in furniture, shower curtains, and flooring, they can accumulate in household dust, which you can then inhale. "Ventilation is important," says Akhgar Ghassabian, MD, PhD, at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine. "And if you're vacuuming, make sure you do that with the window open."

Refuse paper receipts.

Go for the digital ones instead; thermal paper receipts (the ones that are a little glossy) are often coated in bisphenols.

Limit your use of vinyl.

Plasticizers are generally a key ingredient in vinyl products. When possible, choose alternate materials for shower curtains, flooring, car interiors, and clothing, says Amy Ziff, the founder of Made Safe, an organization that has partnered with CR to identify potentially harmful ingredients in products. She says vinyl is sometimes called "vegan leather."

Plastic Chemicals in Popular Foods: What Our Tests Showed

The grocery store foods and fast foods CR tested are listed in order of total phthalates per serving. While there is no level that scientists have confirmed as safe, lower levels are better. Our results show that although the chemicals are widespread in our food, levels can vary dramatically even among similar products, so in some cases you may be able to use our chart to choose products with lower levels. (Not all tested foods are shown in this chart.)

BEVERAGES	TOTAL PHTHALATES PER SERVING (NANOGRAMS)*
Lipton Brisk Lemonade *(can)*	7,467
Coca-Cola Original *(plastic)*	6,167
Lipton Diet Green Tea Citrus *(plastic)*	4,433
Poland Spring 100% Natural Spring Water *(plastic)*	4,217
Juicy Juice 100% Juice Apple *(plastic)*	3,348
Pepsi Cola *(can)*	2,938
Juicy Juice 100% Juice Apple *(cardboard box)*	2,260
Gatorade Frost Thirst Quencher Glacier Freeze *(plastic)*	1,752
Polar Seltzer Raspberry Lime *(can)*	0

*Includes the 10 phthalates we tested for: BBP, DBP, DiBP, DCHP, DEP, DEHP, DnHP, DMP, DiNP, and DNOP. We also tested for three chemicals used as phthalate substitutes (DEHA, DEHT, and DINCH), and three bisphenols (BPA, BPS, and BPF), which are not shown in this chart.

CANNED BEANS	TOTAL PHTHALATES PER SERVING (NANOGRAMS)*
Hormel Chili With Beans *(can)*	9,847
Bush's Chili Red Beans Mild Chili Sauce *(can)*	6,405
Great Value (Walmart) Baked Beans Original *(can)*	6,184
Bush's Baked Beans Original *(can)*	3,709

CONDIMENTS	
Mrs. Butterworth's Syrup Original *(plastic)*	1,010
Hunt's Tomato Ketchup *(can)*	574
Sweet Baby Ray's Barbecue Sauce Original *(plastic)*	22

DAIRY	
Fairlife Core Power High Protein Milk Shake Chocolate *(plastic)*	20,452
SlimFast High Protein Meal Replacement Shake Creamy Chocolate *(plastic)*	16,916

DAIRY *continued*	TOTAL PHTHALATES PER SERVING (NANOGRAMS)*
Yoplait Original Low Fat Yogurt French Vanilla *(plastic)*	10,948
Tuscan Dairy Farms Whole Milk *(plastic)*	10,932
Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream Vanilla *(paperboard carton)*	6,387
Wholesome Pantry (ShopRite) Organic Whole Milk *(carton)*	4,620
Great Value (Walmart) Ice Cream Homestyle Vanilla *(plastic)*	3,068
Jell-O Pudding Snacks Original Chocolate *(plastic)*	1,756
Sargento Sliced Natural Cheddar Cheese Sharp *(plastic)*	1,481
Land O'Lakes Butter Salted *(paper wrap/cardboard)*	581

FAST FOOD	
Wendy's Crispy Chicken Nuggets *(paperboard)*	33,980
Moe's Southwest Grill Chicken Burrito *(aluminum foil)*	24,330
Chipotle Chicken Burrito *(aluminum foil)*	20,579
Burger King Whopper With Cheese *(paper)*	20,167
Burger King Chicken Nuggets *(paper bag)*	19,782
Wendy's Dave's Single With Cheese *(aluminum foil/paper wrap)*	19,520
McDonald's Quarter Pounder With Cheese *(cardboard)*	9,956
Wendy's Natural-Cut French Fries *(paperboard)*	8,876
Burger King Classic French Fries *(paperboard)*	8,512

WHY CHEMICAL SUBSTITUTES MAY NOT BE BETTER

WHILE CR FOUND high levels of phthalates in many foods, we found even higher levels of several chemicals that have been developed to replace those phthalates. Researchers say that although little is known about these substitutes, some may pose similar risks. This phenomenon—industry replacing a dangerous chemical with a newer one that might not be any safer—is so common that it has its own name: regrettable substitution.

In our tests, we found both phthalates and their replacements in many products, with the alternatives often at much higher concentrations. That was especially true for fast foods. For example, a chicken burrito with rice and beans from Moe's Southwest Grill had 48 parts per billion (ppb) total phthalates—and 15,351 ppb phthalate substitutes. That's 320 times as much.

Environmental health experts have seen this scenario play out before. It happened when research about the risks of BPA led to public outcry that prompted manufacturers to replace it with similar chemicals like BPS and BPF, while declaring their products "BPA free." It's happening now with phthalates, as growing awareness of their potential harms have led to increased use of alternative plasticizers.

"When a spotlight is shined on a particular phthalate or bisphenol, the manufacturer quickly moves on to a first cousin chemical," says Philip Landrigan, MD, of Boston College. "Oftentimes we have little or no information on the substitute,

FAST FOOD *continued*	TOTAL PHTHALATES PER SERVING (NANOGRAMS)*
McDonald's Chicken McNuggets *(cardboard)*	8,030
Little Caesars Classic Cheese Pizza *(cardboard box)*	5,703
McDonald's French Fries *(paperboard)*	5,538
McDonald's Quarter Pounder Hamburger Patty *(varied)*	5,428
Taco Bell Chicken Burrito *(paper wrap)*	4,720
Domino's Hand Tossed Cheese Pizza *(cardboard box)*	4,356
Wendy's Dave's Single Hamburger Patty *(varied)*	3,629
Burger King Whopper Hamburger Patty *(varied)*	2,870
Pizza Hut Original Cheese Pan Pizza *(cardboard box)*	2,718

GRAINS

General Mills Cheerios Original *(paper/cardboard)*	10,980
Success 10 Minute Boil-in-Bag White Rice *(paper/cardboard)*	4,308
Pepperidge Farm Farmhouse Hearty White Bread *(plastic bag)*	2,184

INFANT FOOD

Gerber Mealtime for Baby Harvest Turkey Dinner *(glass with lined lid)*	4,267
Similac Advance Infant Milk-Based Powder Formula *(can)*	4,202
Beech-Nut Fruities Pouch Pear, Banana & Raspberries *(pouch)*	2,826
Gerber Cereal for Baby Rice *(plastic)*	1,599
Happy Baby Organics Clearly Crafted Banana & Strawberries *(glass with lined lid)*	1,300

INFANT FOOD *continued*	TOTAL PHTHALATES PER SERVING (NANOGRAMS)*
Happy Baby Organic Milk-Based Infant Powder Formula With Iron *(plastic)*	977
Gerber Organic for Baby Pouch Apple Zucchini Spinach Strawberry *(pouch)*	706

MEAT AND POULTRY

Perdue Ground Chicken Breast *(foam tray with plastic wrap)*	9,985
Trader Joe's Ground Pork 80% Lean 20% Fat *(foam tray with plastic wrap)*	5,503
Premio Foods Sweet Italian Sausage *(foam tray with plastic wrap)*	4,725
Libby's Corned Beef *(can)*	4,088
Bar S Chicken Jumbo Franks *(plastic)*	3,295
Stop & Shop Ground Beef 80% Lean 20% Fat *(paperboard with plastic wrap)*	2,729
Applegate Naturals Oven Roasted Turkey Breast *(plastic)*	2,295
Swanson White Premium Chunk Chicken Breast *(can)*	1,376
Johnsonville Smoked Sausage Beef Hot Links *(plastic)*	912

PACKAGED FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Del Monte Sliced Peaches in 100% Fruit Juice *(can)*	24,928
Green Giant Cream Style Sweet Corn *(can)*	7,603
Del Monte Fresh Cut Italian Green Beans *(can)*	5,264

PACKAGED FRUITS AND VEGETABLES *continued*	TOTAL PHTHALATES PER SERVING (NANOGRAMS)*
Progresso Vegetable Classics Vegetable Soup *(can)*	2,888
Birds Eye Steam Fresh Cut Green Beans *(plastic bag)*	907
Hunt's Tomato Sauce *(can)*	680

PREPARED MEALS

Annie's Organic Cheesy Ravioli *(can)*	53,579
Chef Boyardee Beefaroni Pasta in Tomato and Meat Sauce *(can)*	13,628
Banquet Chicken Pot Pie *(plastic/paperboard)*	12,494
Campbell's Chunky Classic Chicken Noodle Soup *(plastic)*	6,768
Chef Boyardee Big Bowl Beefaroni Pasta in Meat Sauce *(plastic)*	5,064
Campbell's Chicken Noodle Soup *(can)*	2,848
Red Baron Brick Oven Cheese-Trio Pizza *(paperboard)*	1,707

SEAFOOD

Chicken of the Sea Pink Salmon in Water Skinless Boneless *(can)*	24,321
King Oscar Wild Caught Sardines in Extra Virgin Olive Oil *(can)*	7,792
Snow's Chopped Clams *(can)*	4,380
StarKist Wild Caught Light Tuna in Water *(pouch)*	1,735
StarKist Chunk Light Tuna in Water *(can)*	1,687
Season Brand Sardines in Water Skinless & Boneless *(can)*	1,258

and this speaks to a much bigger problem: Chemicals are allowed to come on the market in this country with almost no premarket safety testing."

That gap is why safety advocates say regulators should apply the "precautionary principle" when new, related chemicals come on the market, and assume them to be unsafe until proven otherwise. And they say that chemicals should be regulated as classes rather than individually. "Otherwise, regulators are just playing whack-a-mole as they try to keep up as industry creates new, potentially toxic chemicals, without adequate testing," says Michael Hansen, PhD, a senior scientist at CR. "We need to get ahead of the problem, not play catch-up."

—Lauren Kirchner

Moe's Southwest Grill chicken burrito has very high levels of phthalate substitutes, which may be as harmful as the chemicals they replace.

PHOTO: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

SAVE AND SPEND MORE SAFELY ONLINE

Concerned that it's too risky to use your bank's app or a service like Venmo? Here's what you need to know about the benefits (and risks) of using personal finance websites and apps.

BY SCOTT MEDINTZ

WHEN IT COMES TO TECHNOLOGY, I'm not what you'd call an early adopter. I still read books in print. I resist texting in favor of phone calls. And I have conducted little of my financial life online, which is ironic because I've been a personal finance journalist for a long time.

But moments before writing this, I deposited my first check—a $15 insurance reimbursement—using a banking app. It was absurdly simple to do, and I instantly felt silly for clinging so long to my practice of trudging over to my bank branch to make deposits.

If you too have resisted using digital tools to manage money, it may be time to reconsider. From sending money to loved ones and paying your bills to splitting a check at a restaurant, digital tools make routine money moves highly convenient and are easy to use.

Many are designed to be employed on a mobile device, such as a smartphone or tablet. But if you feel more comfortable managing your money on your home computer, lots of businesses have websites where you can make many of the same money moves.

You may be concerned about the security of handling your money by app or online. But conducting business on public WiFi networks is not the concern it once was because most big companies now use encryption. Privacy and security risks do remain—but CR's experts can pinpoint them, and tell you how to protect yourself.

Here we look at four popular financial tech tools, why you might want to use them, and how to do so.

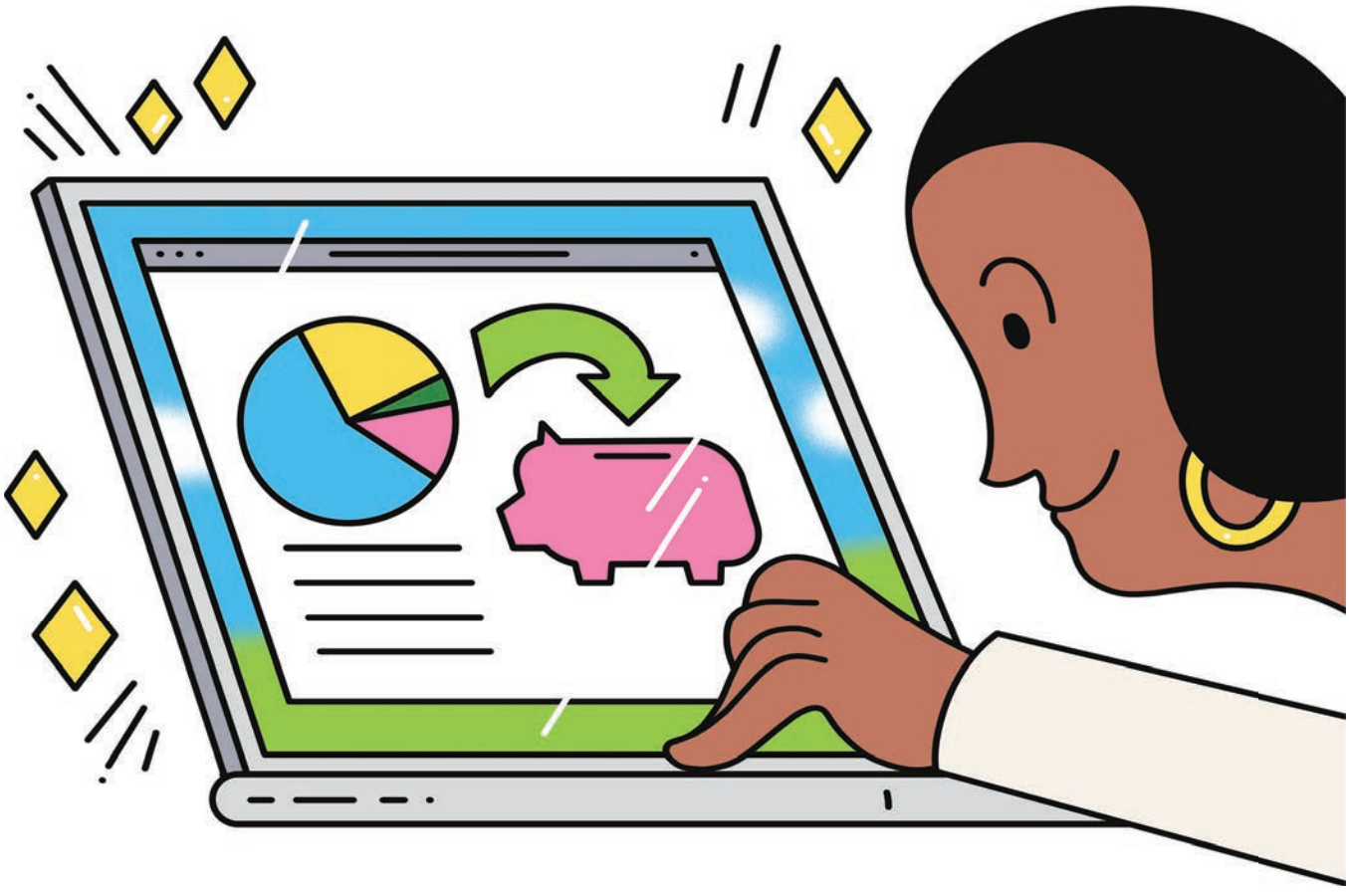
Before coming to Consumer Reports as a writer and editor, **Scott Medintz** was an editor at Time and Money magazines.

BANKING APPS AND WEBSITES

WHAT THEY'RE GOOD FOR: Most of the routine tasks you might do at a bank branch can be accomplished quickly and easily on your phone, tablet, or computer. In addition to depositing checks from almost anywhere (simply by taking a photo of both sides of an endorsed check and tapping "submit"), this includes checking balances, paying bills, and transferring funds.

Online bill paying in particular can be a huge time-saver (no opening paper bills, no check writing, no buying stamps). If you're confident that you'll always have enough money on hand, you can set up your account to automatically pay bills that stay the same each month, such as your mortgage. And if you already authorize certain vendors, like your cable provider, to "pull" money

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SAM ISLAND



from your bank account electronically, know that "push" payments that you authorize through your bank give you more control over your funds.
WHAT THEY COST: Typically nothing beyond the standard costs of maintaining your bank accounts.
RISKS TO CONSIDER: The biggest is that your device is lost or stolen and someone uses it to access your money.
PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE: First, protect your phone using the security settings. The names of the settings vary slightly depending on the type of phone you have. But make sure the phone is set to lock automatically after no more than a few minutes of inactivity. It can then be unlocked with a passcode or biometric authentication, which recognizes your face or fingerprint. Also, know how to remotely disable access or wipe your device clean if it is stolen or lost.

Second, in your banking app or website, enable two-factor (aka multi-factor) authentication, which usually allows online account access only after you enter a password and a secret code that your bank will typically send to your mobile device in real time.

Finally–and this goes for all financial technology–always use unique and complex passwords, or one of the password managers that CR recommends, such as 1Password Families (1password.com) and Dashlane Premium (dashlane.com).

PEER-TO-PEER PAYMENTS

Apple Cash, Cash App, PayPal, Venmo, Zelle
WHAT THEY'RE GOOD FOR: If you're like me, once you start transferring money to friends, family members, and others using a peer-to-peer (P2P) payment app–say, to split a restaurant tab–it'll be hard to believe you ever got along without it.

Plus, though P2P apps are intended for transfers between people who know one another, most small businesses now accept P2P payments, and some informal ones–like farmers market vendors–insist on them.
WHAT THEY COST: Nothing, with a few important exceptions. You'll be charged a 3 percent fee if you fund outgoing transactions with a credit card rather than through a bank account. And most P2P apps charge a 0.5 to 1.75 percent fee if you want to instantly transfer incoming funds to your bank account; otherwise, it takes one to three business days. (Zelle is the exception in both cases: It doesn't allow credit card transactions, and instant access to funds is standard.)
RISKS TO CONSIDER: The most notorious problem is when users type in the wrong recipient address and send money to the wrong person. In such cases, the apps generally won't reimburse users. Nor will they help (with only a few exceptions) if you're tricked into sending money to a fraudster–if, say, you bought

something online from what turns out to be a business that doesn't really exist. In short, many of the legal rights you have when using a credit card don't exist with P2P payments.

Also worth noting: Funds left in your P2P account may not be insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, as they would be in a bank account.

PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE: Before sending money, confirm the recipient's identity with a phone number, email address, or QR code. Consider sending a $1 test payment and confirming it was received before sending more. Move money from your P2P account into an FDIC-insured bank account as soon as possible. And turn on all identity verification options in the app.

Also, don't broadcast to the world everyone you send money to, which is the default setting on some P2P apps. For how to prevent that, see "How to Protect Your Privacy," at right.

DIGITAL WALLETS

Apple Pay, Google Pay, Samsung Pay

WHAT THEY'RE GOOD FOR: Digital wallets store credit and debit card information in your smartphone so that you can pay for things by waving your device at the credit card reader. They also have security benefits: Unlike a credit card, your phone and account data are protected by passwords, biometric authentication, and encryption if they fall into the wrong hands.

Digital wallets can also store digital event tickets and airline boarding passes, so you don't have to dig through email at the gate or print those out in advance. They can also be used to store loyalty rewards cards, coupons, and gift cards.

WHAT THEY COST: Generally nothing, but standard P2P fees may apply if you choose to use a digital wallet that way.

RISKS TO CONSIDER: Someone steals your phone and uses it to access your funds or card information. Or your phone dies, and you don't have plastic cards with you.

PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE: Again, make sure all available security tools are on, and that you can remotely disable or erase your phone if it's lost. Also, keep a separate list of the cards in your digital wallet so that you can cancel them if needed. (It's smart to do the same with the cards in your purse or wallet, too.)

BUDGETING APPS

Empower, EveryDollar, Goodbudget, Monarch, NerdWallet, PocketGuard, Simplifi, You Need a Budget

WHAT THEY'RE GOOD FOR: Helping you build and manage a budget by making it easy to track, visualize, and analyze your spending by category and to set savings and debt reduction goals.

WHAT THEY COST: A few cost nothing, but many offer free entry-level versions and charge between $8 and $18 a month for more robust features. Many also offer a free trial period.

RISKS TO CONSIDER: If your phone is lost or stolen, your financial information could potentially be exposed. In addition, says CR technology and privacy policy analyst Matt Schwartz, "consumers who use these apps won't always be able to limit the sharing and monetization of their data, especially if they live in a state with no comprehensive privacy law."

PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE: Use complex passwords, enable biometric and two-factor authentication, and know how to disable your phone from afar if it goes missing.

How to Protect Your Privacy

Another concern about financial technology is that it could leak your personal information—not only to marketers but also potentially to businesses, data brokers, and even governments that could use it inappropriately.

What to do about it? Start by limiting the information your phone shares with the app. On an iPhone, go to Settings, scroll to the app in question, then deny it access to any features it doesn't need to function, such as location tracking; on Android phones, go to Settings, then Privacy, then Permission Manager, then permission type.

Check the privacy settings within the apps as well. With Venmo, for example, the "private" setting will prevent all the world from knowing with whom you exchange money.

But those controls generally do not prevent apps from sharing your info with third parties that aren't involved in the core service. Some providers let you opt out when you first set up an account. (Read the terms and conditions carefully.) After that, you may need to send an email or letter to the company. But a growing number of states, with support from CR and other privacy advocates, are considering laws that would prohibit companies of all kinds from collecting more data than they need without consent, and would enable consumers to easily opt out of data sharing.

YOUR HEALTHY COOKING TOOLKIT

The right kitchen helpers can make it easier to prep delicious, good-for-you meals. Here are the gadgets and gear that CR's pros—and top chefs—rely on the most.

by Sara Morrow

HEALTHY COOKING AT HOME generally requires more fresh stuff—vegetables, fruits, proteins—and that means more washing, chopping, preparation, and cleanup. That might explain why many people think that making healthy meals is a tall order. According to a 2023 national survey by the Cleveland Clinic, nearly half of Americans view nutritious food as expensive, and nearly a quarter of us think we don't have time to prepare healthy meals.

Doing the job efficiently and getting the most from the fresh foods you buy comes down, in large part, to the gear. Having the right tools in your kitchen can make the job easier—and save you time and money.

On the following pages we'll walk you through the everyday equipment that experts, including CR's own testers, reporters, and food safety pros, use at home.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SARAH ANNE WARD

COMPACT PERSONAL BLENDER

You might hesitate to get your full-sized blender out of the cupboard to whip up a single smoothie (that heavy base! the giant pitcher!), but a smaller version with a to-go cup delivers convenience. Pack the tumbler with greens, frozen fruit, water or milk, and blend. It can also pinch hit for a food processor when you need to whir a salad dressing or chop nuts.

BEAST B10 PERSONAL BLENDER $165 — 76 OVERALL SCORE

STARFRIT HIGH-POWERED 024306 PERSONAL BLENDER $70 — 70 OVERALL SCORE

A CUTTING BOARD COLLECTION

According to James E. Rogers, PhD, director and acting head of product safety testing at CR, it's time to replace old boards when you notice grooves, which could trap bacteria even after cleaning. A move away from plastic is best. (See "How to Eat Less Plastic," starting on page 24.) Food-grade silicone boards, such as the **Liflicon Silicone Cutting Board** ($35 for two, amazon.com) may be safer, but some flexible ones can be floppy and harder to store. Wood or paper composite boards are firmer. Look for ones with nonslip grips, like the **Epicurean Nonslip Groove Cutting Board** ($65 for two, surlatable.com). Always use one board for raw meat and another for fruit and veggies.

RIMMED BAKING SHEETS

A sheet pan meal—where you cook, say, chicken, broccoli, and potatoes together—is one way to simplify dinnertime. "The larger the pan, the better, so you can add plenty of vegetables to your protein and still spread the food out for even cooking," says Amy Keating, RD, who leads CR's nutrition and food testing. Our tests found that uncoated pans cook more evenly and last longer.

MADE IN COOKWARE HALF SHEET PAN $25 — 88 OVERALL SCORE

NORDIC WARE NATURALS BAKERS' HALF SHEET PAN $14 — 88 OVERALL SCORE

PROP STYLING BY SOPHIA PAPPAS

SODA MAKER

Staying hydrated is a snap when you've got an endless supply of seltzer water. (Not to mention that it's easier to cut back on sugary soda when you have something just as delicious to drink.) Add flavor, if you'd like, with fresh lemon or lime, or a splash of fruit juice such as cranberry or grapefruit. In our most recent evaluation, the **SodaStream Terra** ($100, sodastream.com) stood out as the best value.

OIL SPRITZER

Turn any cooking oil you prefer into a spray with a refillable, nonaerosol bottle. Better still, get a two-pack, like the aluminum set from **Misto** ($20, amazon.com) and use the spare for your favorite vinegar for a quick, light way to dress any salad.

SALAD SPINNER

Rather than buying packaged lettuce, try whole lettuce (less likely to be contaminated by bacteria) chopped or torn, then washed in a spinner. And you can use a spinner for much more than salad. It's great for everything from broccoli florets to herbs to chopped leeks. In a recent lab test, the **Farberware Pro Salad Spinner** ($22, walmart.com) was the only one to remove all of the water from our greens. It also had the largest capacity, holding more than 5.5 cups of spring mix.

DIGITAL FOOD SCALE

A handy helper for portion control, a scale is also a must if you're serious about baking or if you're working with recipes that list weight rather than volume. Trying to limit alcohol? Pour, say, a glass of wine on a zeroed-out scale to make sure you're not overestimating 5 ounces. One option: **The Greater Goods Digital Kitchen Scale** ($18, walmart.com).

A MIX OF SKILLETS

It's helpful to keep a few types on hand, says Ellie Krieger, a host on the Food Network. Her cookbook "Whole in One" (Da Capo Lifelong Books, $30) covers healthy meals prepared in a single skillet, pan, or pot. Cast iron can go from cooktop to oven, and nonstick skillets in a few sizes will handle anything from eggs to seared salmon. For pans made without PTFE (a compound made from chemicals that may be harmful), choose nonstick ones with a ceramic interior, like those at right.

TRAMONTINA ENAMELED CAST-IRON SERIES 1000
$65
79 OVERALL SCORE

CARAWAY CERAMIC-COATED NONSTICK FRYING PAN
$95
89 OVERALL SCORE

GREENPAN PADOVA IN BLUSH CERAMIC NONSTICK FRYPAN SET $100
88 OVERALL SCORE

HARDWORKING COUNTERTOP APPLIANCES

Depending on the types of food you cook frequently, the right countertop appliance can save hands-on time. Mostly roast veggies and cook protein? See the air fryer. Like recipes that call for slow-cooking or pressure-cooking? A multi-cooker will fit the bill. If you focus on grains, our testing found that a rice cooker is your best bet.

RICE COOKER

If whole grains are a staple of your diet, this appliance automates anything from basic brown rice to fancy ancient grains to steel cut oats—and does the job better than a multi-cooker. "Even the rice cookers at the bottom of our ratings make rice better than a multi-cooker," says Larry Cuifo, a CR test engineer. One thing to note: CR's past tests of rice found high levels of arsenic in a variety of them. Our advice is to always rinse your rice before cooking, says Tunde Akinleye, a chemist and CR food safety tester.

INSTANT ZEST 8-CUP RICE COOKER $30 — 70 OVERALL SCORE

AIR FRYER

You can roast, bake, or "fry" a variety of foods in less time than it takes in an oven or on a cooktop—with very little fat. "An air fryer is great for quickly cooking a chicken breast and a side of veggies, like brussels sprouts," says CR home reporter Tanya Christian. Look for a dishwasher-safe basket, and be aware that capacity varies. Our top pick, the Dash Tasti-Crisp DCAF260, $60, has only 1.9 usable quarts, while the Gourmia, above, has a measured capacity of 4.3 quarts.

GOURMIA GAF686 DIGITAL AIR FRYER $60 — 80 OVERALL SCORE

MULTI-COOKER

If you love soups or other dishes that require long simmering or pressure-cooking, dust off the multi-cooker you bought during the 2010s Instant Pot craze or consider treating yourself to a new one. They have functions like sautéing, steaming, and rice-cooking. Dan Buettner, author of many books on longevity, including "The Blue Zones Kitchen" (National Geographic, $32.50), relies on his to cook presoaked dried beans. (You can freeze some after cooking to have them on hand later.)

ZAVOR LUX LCD: ZSELL02 MULTI-COOKER $160 — 82 OVERALL SCORE

KNIFE SHARPENER

A sharp knife like our top pick, the Henckels Premio 8" Chef's Knife ($45, zwillings.com)—is essential when you're chopping veggies every day. But the unsung hero? An easy-to-use sharpener that will encourage you to care for the blade. The **Chef'sChoice Trizor 15XV Electric Knife Sharpener** at right ($180, surlatable.com) is designed to sharpen to a precise 15-degree angle (the sweet spot for most knives). For a cheaper option, there's the **Chef'sChoice AngleSelect Manual Sharpener** ($60, chefschoice.com).

PHOTO: SARAH ANNE WARD; PROP STYLING BY SOPHIA PAPPAS (TOP RIGHT)

UNDER-THE-COUNTER INTELLIGENCE

Smaller tools can make or break healthy food prep—but many of us keep using worn-out stuff that has lived in a drawer for years. The versatile handheld items here make many kitchen tasks much easier.

❶ A BENCH SCRAPER

Traditionally used for handling dough or scraping bowls and surfaces, this is surprisingly handy for transferring large quantities of chopped ingredients (scooping up and moving garlic, peppers, onions, and so on from cutting board to pot as you're making chili, for example). The dishwasher-safe **Chef'n Pastrio Bench Chopper Set** (set of three, $13, amazon.com) nests for easy storage.

❷ APPLE CORER

It's the secret to prepping a pile of apples for a pie quickly. One swift move and you've got perfect slices. The **Prepworks Apple and Pear Slicer** ($22, amazon.com) has raised handles and a hinged cover for safe storage.

❸ MEASURING SPOONS AND ❹ CUPS (2 SETS OF EACH)

You won't have to pause to wash up midrecipe if you have an extra set. **Sur La Table's set of six spice measuring spoons** ($22, surlatable.com) are stainless steel, dishwasher-safe, and narrow enough to fit in small jars. Magnets in the handles of **Oxo's measuring cup set** keep the group together ($23, oxo.com).

❺ KITCHEN SHEARS

They make fast work of cutting chives, scallions, and other herbs to instantly enliven a meal. Ellie Krieger of the Food Network even uses them to cut up pizza. (Bonus: No need to wash a cutting board after.) The **iBayam Kitchen Scissors** ($12 for two, amazon.com) were the top pick from our recent evaluation.

❻ MICROPLANE ZESTER AND ❼ LEMON PRESS

Another healthy flavor boost? Citrus, says CR's Amy Keating. "Zest adds zing. I love it in a salad, soups, dips, and more." The **Oxo Etched Zester** ($11, oxo.com) is a good bet. A squeeze of juice at the end of cooking will brighten the flavor of food. A reamer with handles, like the **KitchenAid Citrus Juice Presser** ($25, amazon.com), will be easier to use.

STAINLESS STEEL OR CERAMIC MIXING BOWLS

"Given the research we've done around chemicals in plastics, any opportunity I have to avoid plastic in the kitchen, I take," says Sana Mujahid, CR's manager for food safety testing. Her pick for bowls: a lidded, steel nesting set from **Core Kitchen** ($30, amazon.com) that makes it easy to store leftovers in the fridge. A set that starts with a 5-quart (or bigger!) bowl will ensure you have the right size for nearly any task, says Paul Hope, a CR home reporter (and trained chef).

RUBBERMAID BRILLIANCE 18 PC GLASS FOOD STORAGE CONTAINER SET $79

93 OVERALL SCORE

GLASS OR STAINLESS STEEL FOOD STORAGE CONTAINERS

We recently tested a variety of food storage containers and found glass and steel options that kept food very fresh, including the glass set pictured above and the stainless set listed below. But like all 25 products we tested, they have plastic lids, so don't fill the containers to the brim, and hand-wash the lids. All of the silicone containers we tested leaked. An easy, nonplastic option: Mason jars, which can store leftovers, fruits, and veggies in the fridge.

HOMEARRAY 10 PC STAINLESS STEEL FOOD STORAGE CONTAINER SET $43

97 OVERALL SCORE

PHOTO: SARAH ANNE WARD; PROP STYLING BY SOPHIA PAPPAS (BOTTOM LEFT AND TOP RIGHT)

FOOD STORAGE PROBLEMS, SOLVED

Q: If one berry goes bad, do you have to throw away the whole batch?
A: No. But remove any pieces that have turned, and give their neighbors a close look for any signs of mold. "One bad berry will ruin the entire batch quickly," Hope says. Then wash the remaining produce before you use it.

Q: Lettuce and greens never seem to last. What's the best way to maximize their shelf life?
A: Wash greens and dry them thoroughly before you throw them in the fridge. (See our salad spinner pick on page 38.) If you don't plan to use them soon, wrap the lettuce leaves in a dry paper towel and place them in a storage container. "Excessive moisture is the biggest enemy for most produce," Hope says. "And that paper towel provides a place for any leftover moisture to get absorbed."

Q: What about avocados?
A: A hack recently made the rounds on the internet, in which people stored whole avocados in water to make them stay fresh longer. That's a no, per the Food and Drug Administration, because the water is a breeding ground for foodborne illness. There's no magic trick here: Keep whole avocados on the counter and check every day for ripeness, then transfer them to the fridge. Once an avocado is cut, add acid (like lemon juice) to the exposed flesh to slow oxidation.

Q: What should go in each crisper drawer?
A: In many fridges, you can adjust the humidity of each drawer. You want high humidity for veggies that wilt (leafy greens, carrots) and low humidity for most fruit and veggies with thin skin; they like drier air. And try not to mix items: Pears, for example, give off ethylene gas that makes some produce, like broccoli, spoil faster.

THE BEST WAYS TO STOP A HEADACHE

Almost everyone gets them sometimes. But these steps can nip head pain in the bud, and even prevent it. **by Lisa L. Gill**

YOUR HEAD HURTS. Maybe you were staring at your computer or phone too long. Or you skipped breakfast, or didn't sleep well, or got stressed fighting traffic. But now that it's here, what can you do to get rid of that headache, and when is it a sign of something more serious?

From drugs to natural cures to behavioral therapy, we have more treatments to relieve head pain than ever. And that's important because almost everyone gets headaches, and some of us get them often. In fact, a 2022 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 2,185 adult Americans found that 88 percent say they get a headache at least sometimes, and 1 in 5 get them at least once a week.

But people often minimize how severe the problem is and don't seek help soon enough, says Teshamae Monteith, MD, chief of the headache division at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. Here, we'll help you figure out what kind of headache you might have, how to get relief, what works, and when to know it's time to get medical care.

18%

of women suffer from migraines.

Source: November 2022 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 2,185 U.S. adults.

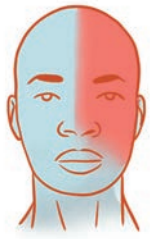
7%
of men suffer from migraines.
56%
of adults in the U.S. get a headache at least once a month.
20%
have at least one headache a week, including 5 percent who suffer from a headache almost daily.

KNOW YOUR HEADACHE

The first step in dealing with your headache is knowing what kind you have. That's a bit complicated because headaches come in lots of flavors: The International Headache Society has identified hundreds of types, from common tension headaches and migraines to less common but debilitating cluster headaches to oddballs like the one that comes after eating an ice cream cone too fast. Knowing the variety is important: Treatment can vary by type as well as by how severe and frequent your headaches are, and by what triggers them. Here are the key features of some common or severe types of headaches, plus what to do about them.

Tension

Symptoms: Mild to moderate pain at the front of your head or around your eyes that spreads as a tightening band. It often starts a few hours after waking and lasts 4 to 6 hours. They're called chronic when you have them 15 days a month or more.
Causes: Stress, bad sleep, eye strain, overexertion, bad posture, and other causes can activate nerve endings called nociceptors. These send messages via the trigeminal nerve, which runs from the lining around your brain to your mouth, neck, ears, eyes, and throat, tensing your scalp and neck.
Treatments: Over-the-counter acetaminophen (Tylenol or generic) can help, as can an OTC nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug, or NSAID, like ibuprofen (Advil or generic) or naproxen (Aleve or generic). Beware: Taking NSAIDS in high doses or for more than nine days can trigger overuse, or rebound, headaches.



Migraine

Symptoms: Moderate to severe pain, usually on one side of the head and sometimes neck, lasting from a few hours to several days, worsened by even mild activity. Often accompanied by nausea and auras–seeing stars, zigzags, or flashing lights–which can affect vision, speech, and movement. The final stage can feel like a hangover: achiness, fogginess, and a stiff neck.
Causes: Stress, bad sleep, weather changes, strong smells, alcohol, certain foods (such as chocolate and cured meats), and exposure to sunlight or bright, flashing, fluorescent, or LED lights.
Treatments: Acetaminophen, an NSAID, or both might help, as might a pill such as Excedrin, which combines acetaminophen, aspirin, and caffeine. For severe migraines, drugs called triptans may be prescribed. Side effects include nausea, drowsiness, and dizziness, and frequent use can trigger rebound headaches.

Why Migraines Are Tough to Treat

RESEARCHERS NOW KNOW that migraines are not, as previously thought, a psychological disorder unique to high-strung women, or even a problem of impaired blood flow to the brain. Instead, they are understood as part of a central nervous system disorder that inflames nerve fibers in the blood vessels lining the brain's protective outer membrane.

Migraines, which tend to run in families, are much more common in women than in men. In fact, migraine is the most common disabling condition among women 50 and under, and trails only back pain among leading causes of disability in all women, says Teshamae Monteith, MD, chief of the headache division at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.

That could be because migraines can be triggered by changes in estrogen levels during menopause,

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JASON SCHNEIDER

Allergy/Sinus

Symptoms: A dull pressure usually on one or both sides of the head and eyes. It's often accompanied by congestion, fever, or, sometimes, discolored nasal phlegm, and can last for several days at a time.
Causes: Congestion and inflammation, called sinusitis, triggered by hay fever or another allergy, or a respiratory infection such as a cold or the flu.
Treatments: Try an over-the-counter decongestant containing pseudoephedrine—either as a standalone drug or in combination with a pain reliever like ibuprofen—available in pill or liquid form—to reduce nasal congestion. You could also consider a nasal spray like Afrin. To avoid nasal irritation and the risk of rebound headaches, don't use a nasal spray for more than three days.

Cluster

Symptoms: An uncommon but very painful headache, officially called trigeminal autonomic cephalgia, that causes a sharp pain behind one eye or temple. It's often accompanied by congestion, runny nose, watery eyes, and a drooping eyelid. The intense pain typically lasts only a few minutes and comes in waves. There may be daily attacks for a few weeks or months, then none for months or years.
Causes: Despite the congestion and runny nose, these are not related to allergies. The cause is unclear, but they appear connected to both the trigeminal nervous system and the hypothalamus, a part of the brain that oversees hormone regulation.
Treatments: If this is your first attack, get immediate medical care to rule out a stroke or other serious problem. If it's diagnosed as a cluster headache, you may be given 100 percent oxygen through a mask and, if that doesn't help, possibly a triptan.

Caffeine Withdrawal

Symptoms: Headache pain that comes on within 24 hours of when you last consumed caffeine. It may be felt on both sides of the head and temples, along with fatigue, nausea, irritability, and depressed mood.
Causes: Regular caffeine consumption affects the levels of certain chemicals in your brain, including adenosine, dopamine, and adrenaline, in complex ways. Depriving your body of caffeine can upset that chemistry, triggering headaches and other symptoms.
Treatments: Consuming a caffeinated beverage, or a pill like Excedrin, which contains caffeine, can help. Or you can try an over-the-counter pain reliever such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or naproxen. If you are trying to consume less caffeine, it's better to slowly lower your intake than to go cold turkey.

PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD, FROM LEFT: DANA NEELY; ADOBE STOCK. PHOTO, FACING PAGE: GETTY IMAGES

menstruation, or pregnancy, as well as from fluctuating hormone levels caused by birth control pills or in vitro fertilization.

And as common as the headaches are, the actual number of people who have migraines may be much higher, Monteith says, because the condition is sometimes misdiagnosed. Around a third of Americans think they've had a migraine at least once that was not diagnosed, according to a November 2022 nationally representative Consumer Reports survey of 2,185 adults.

That's partly because migraines can be easily confused with tension headaches and, especially, sinus headaches, Monteith says. "People may see the sinus doctor because they have sinus symptoms, which is common in migraine," she says.

And if they experience auras, which can cause blurry vision, spots, or flashes of light, they may go to an eye doctor for guidance, she says.

If you experience those symptoms, she recommends seeing your primary care provider or a neurologist.

Also see one of those healthcare providers if your migraine symptoms are so severe that they interfere with your daily life at work or home, or happen so often that you're reaching for over-the-counter pain relievers more than once a week.

That doctor might prescribe a triptan such as sumatriptan or frovatriptan to treat severe attacks.

Or, if you suffer from frequent migraines, ask your healthcare provider about prescription drugs recommended by the American Academy of Neurology to prevent attacks, such as metoprolol, propranolol, or another beta-blocker; or topiramate, divalproex sodium, or another anti-epileptic.

ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS

Here are a few common, effective nondrug ways to ease or prevent headaches, especially migraines. These can be combined with medications or tried on their own. Some, such as biofeedback and medical devices, are less likely to be covered by insurance, says Mia Minen, MD, chief of headache research at NYU Langone Health in New York City.

Behavioral Therapy

This could mean adopting better sleep habits or exercising more, or undergoing relaxation training (where you learn to progressively relax your muscles and pace your breathing) or cognitive behavioral therapy (which involves learning how to identify and change unhelpful responses to stress). Other approaches involve using a thermal biofeedback device to increase blood flow to your fingertips and away from your head, or electromyographic biofeedback, which uses electrodes on your jaw or back to help you learn how to relax those areas.
To try it: Ask your physician for recommendations of licensed providers of these techniques in your area.

Medical Devices

A common one of these is called external trigeminal nerve stimulation (e-TNS). At least one trial of the at-home devices found that they cut migraine pain by nearly 60 percent. When you feel a migraine coming on, you place an adhesive electrode to your forehead that stimulates the trigeminal nerve. They can also be used daily to prevent migraines.
To try it: See if your insurance will cover it, and if it will, ask your doctor for a prescription. If it's not covered, you can order one directly through a company such as Cefaly, though expect to shell out several hundred dollars.

Acupuncture

For headache prevention, growing research confirms that this ancient Chinese practice, which involves inserting tiny needles into the skin at specific points in the body, can modestly reduce the number of both tension headaches and migraines.
To try it: Find an acupuncturist in your area through the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, at directory.nccaom.org. It may be covered by insurance; if it's not, expect to pay upwards of $100 per session.

Physical Therapy

Some people with migraines experience tight shoulder or neck muscles before an attack. Others have such frequent migraines that those muscles remain tense. For people with neck pain, physical therapy to relax and strengthen muscles, or improve posture, can help.
If you want to try: Ask your doctor to recommend a specialist, or search for a certified professional at the American Physical Therapy Association website (apta.org/findapt).

WORD OF CAUTION

Marijuana

While marijuana is sometimes promoted as a treatment for headaches, especially migraines, there's still not much evidence of its effectiveness against the pain. And some research links regular use of cannabis to an increased risk of heart attack, stroke, heart failure, and other health risks. Finally, remember that even medical marijuana is still not legal in many places. (Note that there is also not much evidence for marijuana's THC-free cousin, CBD, in treating or preventing headaches.)

PHOTO, FACING PAGE: GETTY IMAGES

Feel a Headache Coming On? Do This.

No single treatment works for everyone, but here are a few options to try.

ACT FAST

Whatever approach you take, do it as soon as you feel a headache coming, not after it has had a chance to grab hold.

1

TAKE THE MAX DOSE OF AN OTC PAINKILLER

Advil, Aleve, or Tylenol, or a generic version, often helps, especially if you take it early and at the maximum recommended dose.

Important caveat: Don't overdo it. High doses increase the risk of side effects, and taking OTC pain relievers more than nine days a month can actually trigger headaches.

2

HYDRATE

Dehydration can trigger migraines and worsen headaches. Try to drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water each day, and up to about 12.

3

GO QUIET AND DARK

Lie down in a quiet room with the lights low or off to reduce stimulation and help you relax.

4

USE A HOT OR COLD PACK

A hot pack or hot bath can help with a tension headache. An ice pack or ice face mask may ease a migraine.

5

MASSAGE AND STRETCH

For a tension headache, focus on neck and shoulder muscles. That might help with a migraine, too, as can massaging your temples and the back of your head.

6

TRY GINGER

Maybe it sounds odd, but several studies suggest that consuming this anti-inflammatory spice, either the root itself or in powder form, can ease migraines.

SUPPLEMENTS MAY HELP

Many dietary supplements are hyped to prevent or treat headaches, especially migraines, but the evidence is skimpy. Here are several supplements with at least some scientific support.

Vitamin B2

The American Academy of Neurology and the American Headache Society are impressed with the research for this vitamin, also called riboflavin. One study found that people who take 400 mg a day cut the frequency of migraine attacks by two per month compared with placebo.

Vitamin D

Migraine sufferers tend to have lower blood levels of this vitamin than others, and supplements might reduce the number of attacks, some research suggests.

Zinc

A 2020 study found that zinc supplements cut the number of migraines by up to 2.5 per month.

Melatonin

A 2019 review suggested that a small dose of this hormone, typically taken for its potential to help with sleep, cut migraines in half when taken nightly for three to six months.

Coenzyme Q10

A 2021 review found that this supplement, often called CoQ10, slightly reduced the frequency of migraines but did not make them less severe.

Magnesium

Some research suggests that high doses of this mineral can cut the frequency of migraines. High doses can be risky, so consider taking this only under the guidance of a healthcare provider.

When Head Pain Is an Emergency

The searing pain of a sudden headache or the weird visuals like bright zigzag lines or shapes that can accompany migraines may make you think: Is this a stroke? A brain tumor? Thankfully, even severe headaches are usually not emergencies. But sometimes a headache can be a sign of something more serious, says Mia Minen, MD, a headache expert at NYU Langone Health in New York City. Here's how to know when a severe, sudden headache should prompt you to call 911 or have someone take you to the ER.

- **You are pregnant or have a serious, preexisting medical condition.** In pregnancy, a severe headache can indicate dangerously high blood pressure. And severe headaches in people with cancer, COVID-19, or HIV/AIDS can indicate a worsening of the condition.

- **You recently experienced a hard bang on the head.** Head trauma followed by headache plus nausea or vomiting could signal a concussion or bleeding in the brain.

- **Your headache comes with exercise.** Some people suffer tension-type headaches after exercising, but if it includes pain in your chest, jaw, or neck, or difficulty breathing, it could mean a heart attack.

- **Your headache is accompanied by loss of consciousness, convulsions, or shortness of breath.** That could be due to having a type of epileptic seizure.

- **You also experience serious vision problems or problems speaking.** This could be your first migraine with these kinds of symptoms. Or it could be a stroke, especially if you have other symptoms including numbness or weakness on one side of your body or drooping on one side of your face.

- **The headache comes on suddenly, along with a stiff neck, a high fever, and confusion.** This could be meningitis, a swelling of the membrane around your brain and spinal cord.

- **Severe headache, and worsening pain with physical activity, coughing, or straining.** It could signal a brain aneurysm, a bulge in a blood vessel in the brain.

- **The worst headache you've ever had comes on suddenly.** It could be nothing more than a bad headache, Minen says, but it's a good idea to play it safe and head to the ER so you can rule out anything serious, she says.

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

FIRST DRIVE

Ford Mustang

The redesigned Mustang has fresh styling, more power, and advanced technology. The interior makeover emphasizes screens, with the center display offering many options for personalizing the way the car performs, including the loudness of its roar.

CR'S TAKE: The muscular driving experience is what distinguishes the Mustang. It has personality like few other cars. There are compromises, such as its tight cabin, which is challenging to enter, but the Mustang delivers a wild ride in GT and Dark Horse trims.

BASE PRICE RANGE $30,920-$64,560
DESTINATION CHARGE $1,595
PRICE AS DRIVEN $55,200

SAFETY MATTERS

How to Keep Valuables Left in Your Car From Getting Stolen

Car glove boxes these days are **getting smaller** and are often not lockable. In fact, some new cars don't even have a glove box. But there still are **smart places to hide valuables.** Resist the urge to stuff things under the front seats. Most cars have sensitive wiring for airbag sensors there that could get damaged. Instead, consider stashing items in **out-of-the-way spots that can't be seen through the windows,** such as under the cargo floor in the spare tire compartment, or inside door or seat pockets.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

81.7%

The percentage of Americans ages 8 and older who wear a seat belt in the back seat of a car. In a crash, having a seat belt on in the back seat reduces the risk of fatality by at least 54 percent.

Source: : NHTSA, November 2023

RECALL

Toyota

More than 750,000 Toyota Highlander and Highlander Hybrids from the 2020 through 2023 model years have been recalled because the lower front bumper cover assembly and other pieces could detach after even a minor collision. This could create a potential hazard for other users of the road if the bumper cover falls off when driving.

WHAT TO DO: Toyota dealerships will inspect the upper and lower bumper mounting tabs and if no damage is found will install improved connectors free of charge. For more information, call Toyota at 800-331-4331.

ASK OUR EXPERTS

Is it wise to buy a used car selling for under $10,000?

CR's chief mechanic, John Ibbotson, says that while you can find used cars for less than 10K, they may need significant repairs or expensive maintenance. A better option, if you can afford it, is to look for a used car that's closer to $15,000. At that price you'll find 8-year-old sedans and 10-year-old SUVs with at least half their useful life left. If you're considering buying a car with more than 100,000 miles, look at CR's overall reliability ratings for that model and year, check the service records, and have an inspection performed by a professional mechanic before buying.

PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

The Top Tires From Our Tests

We tested hundreds of models to help you pick the right ones for your car and save big when you buy them.

by Jeff S. Bartlett

TIRES MAY ALL look alike, but they can differ significantly in performance, tread life, and price. We bought 456 tires in the past year to test and rate them on metrics including wet and dry braking, ride comfort, and noisiness. Those findings, combined with the results of our survey of CR members on tire retailers, will steer you to the top replacement tires for your car and the best places to buy them.

When You Need New Ones

Our testing has shown that while most car and SUV tires can last 70,000 miles or more, some tires for upscale and sporty models can wear out at just 25,000 to 30,000 miles. CR's tire experts recommend inspecting tires for damage monthly. "Bulges, deep sidewall scrapes, or cracks all may compromise a tire enough to warrant replacement," says CR tire tester Gordon Gingras.

Consumer Reports' tire program manager, Ryan Pszczolkowski, says you should also routinely check tread depth and start shopping for replacement tires when the tread is worn to 4/32 inch. "At that point, there is a measurable decrease in performance but the tire isn't truly worn out yet," Pszczolkowski says. "You still have time to look for rebates and comparison shop." To gauge tread depth, all you need is a quarter and possibly also a penny (see instructions in "Check Your Tread Depth," below).

Check tire pressure at least monthly and keep tires inflated to the pressure level indicated on the sticker in the driver's-side doorjamb. Underinflated tires can wear out earlier and cause increased braking distances and even tire failure, which could lead to a crash. Cold temperatures can cause tire pressure to drop, so be sure to check the pressure level often in winter and top up tires as needed.

How to Choose Tires

"The first step in tire buying is to choose the category that best meets your needs," Pszczolkowski says. Categories include all-season (good for most year-round use), winter/snow (for people who drive frequently in snowy, icy conditions or who just want the best grip possible in wintry weather), and ultra-high-performance summer tires (for sports cars and superior handling at high speeds). Once you decide on a category, find a tire that meets the size, speed rating, and load index specifications for your car (you can find the specs on the driver's-side doorjamb). "It's fine to move up a category, but never move to a lower speed rating or load index because it could adversely affect handling and load-carrying capacity, both important safety factors," Pszczolkowski says. He adds that the wrong size tires can also adversely affect antilock braking and speedometer calibration.

CHECK YOUR TREAD DEPTH

If you insert a quarter upside down into a tire tread and the top of Washington's head is flush with the tread, you have about 4/32 inch of tread left, which means it's time to start shopping. If you do the same with a penny and the top of Lincoln's head is flush with the tread, you have just 2/32 inch of tread left and urgently need to replace the tires for safety's sake.

ILLUSTRATION: T.M. DETWILER

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

"You can often find less pricey alternatives to the top-scoring tires. They may have a slightly lower Overall Score but still perform admirably."

—RYAN PSZCZOLKOWSKI
Consumer Reports' tire program manager

Where to Buy Tires

Tires are sold and installed at national auto repair chains, independent retailers, big-box stores, and warehouse clubs. According to our survey of 5,240 CR members on their experiences with a tire retailer, most were largely satisfied overall with their tire purchase regardless of where they bought them. (Overall satisfaction scores at Mavis, Walmart, and Pep Boys were average or below.) The survey also showed that prices vary widely, with the average price per tire (not including installation) ranging from $134 at Walmart to $240 at Canadian Tire Corp. Pszczolkowski says that you can usually save money without much sacrifice in performance. "You can often find less pricey alternatives to the top-scoring tires. They may have a slightly lower Overall Score but still perform admirably." And don't be shy about asking for a lower price. Most members who did that were able to get a better deal, saving $100 a set on average. Survey results are presented in the chart below. Dashes indicate that we did not obtain an adequate sample to be able to include a rating or that an attribute is not applicable to a particular retailer.

Provider	Overall Satisfaction Score	Price		Test Results								Free Perks (%)*
		Installation cost per tire ($)	Cost per tire ($)	Selection	Sales service	Installation quality	Installation time	Waiting area	Checkout ease	Shipping	Other services	
TIRE RETAILERS												
Independent retailers	94	$25	$193	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	=	⌃⌃	–	⌃⌃	41
Les Schwab Tire Centers	93	–	–	=	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	–	⌃⌃	78
Kal Tire	90	–	–	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	–	⌃⌃	–	–	40
Discount Tire (discounttiredirect.com)	89	$25	$202	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	48
Tirerack.com	87	$29	$198	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	=	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	13
America's Tire	86	–	$189	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	–	⌃	52
Costco	77	$19	$191	=	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	=	⌃⌃	⌃	=	67
Car dealerships	77	$36	$230	=	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	–	⌃⌃	46
Big O Tires	74	–	$192	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	–	⌃⌃	44
Goodyear Auto Service	74	–	$179	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	=	⌃	–	⌃⌃	45
Belle Tire Distributors	71	–	$206	⌃	⌃	⌃	=	⌃	⌃	–	⌃	58
BJ's	71	–	–	=	⌃	⌃	⌃	–	⌃	–	⌃	80
Town Fair Tire Centers	66	–	–	⌃	⌃	⌃	=	⌄	⌃	–	⌃	55
Sam's Club	65	$22	$169	=	=	⌃	⌃	⌄	⌃	⌃	=	64
NTB Tire & Service Centers	64	–	–	=	⌃	⌃	=	–	⌃	–	–	34
Firestone Complete Auto Care	64	–	$189	=	⌃	⌃	=	=	⌃	–	⌃	41
Canadian Tire Corp	62	–	$240	⌃	=	⌃	=	=	⌃	–	⌃	14
Mavis Discount Tire	55	–	$175	=	=	=	=	⌄	⌃	–	⌃	30
Walmart	43	$16	$134	⌄	⌄	=	=	⌄	=	⌃	=	21
Pep Boys	32	–	–	–	–	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	–	–	31

*The percentage of members in our survey who received more than the median number of perks (two) out of a total possible eight perks, like tire rotation, that we asked about.

RULES FOR REPLACING A FLAT

If you're replacing a single flat tire and the repair shop tries to sell you four new tires, don't assume they're out to cheat you: "Ideally, you should always replace tires four at a time and of the same brand and model," Pszczolkowski says. "Replacing just one tire can lead to unbalanced, unpredictable handling."

But while replacing all four may be ideal, it's also costly. The following alternatives can save you money.

For tires with light wear: Pszczolkowski says that if all of your tires have 70 percent or more tread left, you can replace just one tire, placing it on the rear axle. "The differential in tread depth will not be great enough to lead to unbalanced handling," Pszczolkowski says.

For tires with more wear: Buy two new tires and put them both on the rear axle. Unless you're buying four, any replacement tire should be the same model as the others. (Some all-wheel-drive and full-time four-wheel-drive vehicles require that all four tires be changed at once. Check your owner's manual to determine.)

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Three-Season Driving				Winter Driving		Comfort		Other	
			Dry braking	Wet braking	Handling	Hydroplaning	Snow traction	Ice braking	Ride	Noise	Rolling resistance	Tested tread life (Miles)
ALL-SEASON TIRES												
✓ **Michelin** Defender T+H	67	$179	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	●	85,000
✓ **General** Altimax RT43	66	$129	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	●	70,000
Continental TrueContact Tour	63	$139	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	▼	70,000
Hankook Kinergy PT	63	$123	▲	▼	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	▲	85,000
BFGoodrich Advantage Control All Season	62	$126	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▼	55,000
Firestone All Season	61	$104	▲	●	●	▲	▲	●	●	▲	▲▲	65,000
PERFORMANCE ALL-SEASON TIRES												
✓ **Michelin** CrossClimate2 ◫	74	$179	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	▼	85,000
✓ **Continental** PureContact LS	67	$142	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	●	75,000
✓ **Hankook** Kinergy 4S2 ◫	67	$129	▲	●	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼	▲	55,000
✓ **General** Altimax 365 AW ◫	66	$115	●	●	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	60,000
✓ **Vredestein** Quatrac Pro ◫	66	$138	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	●	65,000
Nokian One	65	$123	▲	●	▲	▲	▲▲	●	●	▲	●	65,000
Goodyear Assurance WeatherReady ◫	65	$170	●	●	▲	▲	▲▲	●	●	▲	●	70,000
Nexen N5000 Platinum	63	$116	▲	●	●	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	▲	55,000
Pirelli Cinturato P7 All Season Plus II	63	$130	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▼	●	▲▲	▲	60,000
Yokohama Avid Ascend LX	62	$144	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▼	▲	▲	●	70,000
Yokohama Avid Ascend GT	60	$144	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▼	●	●	●	65,000
Uniroyal Tiger Paw Touring A/S	59	$117	▲	●	●	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▼▼	55,000
Nokian WR G4 ◫	57	$139	▲	▼	●	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	●	50,000
ULTRA-HIGH-PERFORMANCE ALL-SEASON TIRES												
✓ **Michelin** Pilot Sport All Season 4	73	$189	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼	▲▲	▼▼	60,000
✓ **BFGoodrich** g-Force Comp-2 A/S plus	73	$159	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▼	▲	▼	60,000

▼▼ ▼ ● ▲ ▲▲ WORSE — BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | $ CR SMART BUY

◫ All-weather tires.

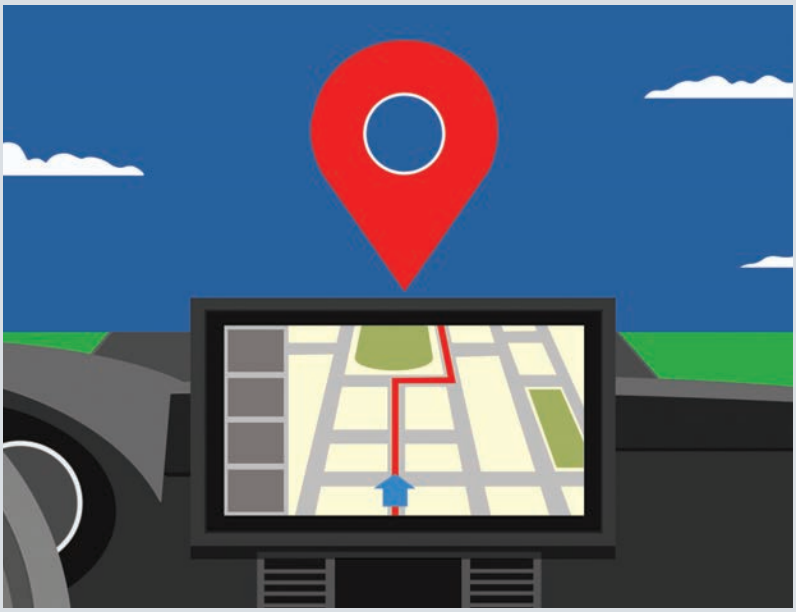
Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Three-Season Driving				Winter Driving		Comfort		Other	
			Dry braking	Wet braking	Handling	Hydroplaning	Snow traction	Ice braking	Ride	Noise	Rolling resistance	Tested tread life (Miles)
ULTRA-HIGH-PERFORMANCE ALL-SEASON TIRES *Continued*												
✓ **Vredestein** Hypertrac All Season	70	$146	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▼	60,000
✓ **Continental** ExtremeContact DWS06 plus	70	$158	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	●	▼▼	60,000
Yokohama Advan Sport A/S+	67	$131	▲▲	●	●	▲	●	▲	●	▲	▼	65,000
General G-Max AS05	65	$149	▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲	▼	▲	▼	55,000
Goodyear Eagle Exhilarate	65	$183	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼	▲	▼▼	40,000
Kumho Ecsta PA51	63	$140	▲	●	▲	▲▲	●	●	▼	▲	▼▼	50,000
Bridgestone Potenza RE980 Plus	63	$170	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼	▲	▼▼	55,000
Cooper Zeon RS3-G1	63	$144	▲	●	▲	▲▲	●	●	▼	▲	▼	55,000
PERFORMANCE WINTER/SNOW TIRES												
✓ **Bridgestone** Blizzak LM005	75	$278	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	NA
✓ **Hankook** Winter I*cept Evo3	75	$203	●	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	▼	NA
✓ **Vredestein** Wintrac Pro	74	$180	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▼	NA
✓ **Michelin** Pilot Alpin PA4	74	$229	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▼	NA
Falken Eurowinter HS01	71	$139	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	▼	NA
Nexen Winguard Sport 2	70	$137	●	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	▼	NA
WINTER/SNOW TIRES												
✓ **Bridgestone** Blizzak WS90	73	$131	▲	▼	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	●	NA
✓ **Michelin** X-Ice Snow	73	$177	●	▼	▼	●	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	NA
✓ **Continental** VikingContact 7	70	$139	●	▼	▼	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	NA
✓ **Hankook** Winter I*cept IZ2	69	$113	●	▼	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	NA
✓ **Goodyear** WinterCommand Ultra	69	$140	●	▼	▼	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	NA
✓ **General** Altimax Arctic 12	68	$122	●	▼	▼	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	NA
Nokian Nordman 7	64	$130	●	▼▼	▼	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▼	●	NA
Nokian Hakkapeliitta R3	64	$177	●	▼	▼	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▼	▲	NA
Toyo Observe GSi-6 HP (H)	64	$113	●	▼	▼	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲	●	NA
Yokohama iceGuard iG53	63	$137	●	▼▼	▼	●	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	NA
Nexen Winguard Ice Plus	62	$108	●	▼	▼	▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	●	NA
Falken Winterpeak F-Ice 1	62	$112	●	▼	▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	●	●	NA
ALL-SEASON TRUCK TIRES												
✓ **Continental** TerrainContact H/T	67	$194	▲	●	▲	●	▲▲	▲	●	▲▲	●	70,000
✓ **General** Grabber HTS60	63	$201	▲	●	●	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	55,000
✓ **Vredestein** Pinza HT	61	$181	▲	●	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	55,000

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Three-Season Driving				Winter Driving		Comfort		Other	
			Dry braking	Wet braking	Handling	Hydroplaning	Snow traction	Ice braking	Ride	Noise	Rolling resistance	Tested tread life (Miles)
ALL-SEASON TRUCK TIRES *Continued*												
✓ **Firestone** Destination LE3	59	$209	▲	–	–	▲	▲	–	▲	▲▲	▲	60,000
Hankook Dynapro HT	57	$195	▲	▼	–	▲	▲	▲	–	▲▲	▲	65,000
Falken Wildpeak H/T HT02	56	$219	▲	–	–	▲	–	–	▼	▲	–	45,000
Nexen Roadian HTX2	56	$199	▲	▼	▲	▲	▲▲	–	▼	–	▲	60,000
Kumho Crugen HT51	56	$185	▲	▼	–	–	▲	–	–	▲	▲	60,000
Goodyear Wrangler Steadfast HT	56	$213	▲	–	–	▲	–	▼	–	–	▼	55,000
ALL-TERRAIN TRUCK TIRES												
✓ **Continental** TerrainContact A/T	64	$269	▲	–	–	▲	▲	–	–	▲▲	–	65,000
✓ **Michelin** LTX A/T2	62	$277	–	▼	–	▲▲	▲	–	–	▼	▲	80,000
✓ **Vredestein** Pinza AT	59	$179	▲	▼	–	▲	▲▲	▲	–	–	▲	60,000
✓ **Goodyear** Wrangler All-Terrain Adventure	56	$232	▲	–	–	–	▲	▲	▼	–	–	50,000
✓ **Bridgestone** Dueler A/T Revo 3	56	$249	▲	▼	–	▲	▲	▼	–	–	▲	50,000
Nexen Roadian ATX	55	$208	▲	▼	–	▲▲	▲	–	–	–	▲	55,000
Hankook Dynapro AT2 Xtreme	55	$211	▲	▼	–	▲	▲	▲	▼	–	▲	70,000
Firestone Destination A/T2	55	$232	▲	▼	–	▲	▲	–	▼	–	▲▲	60,000
Toyo Open Country A/T III	55	$248	▲	▼	–	▲	▲	–	▼	–	–	65,000
Kumho Road Venture AT52	54	$189	▲	▼	–	▲	▲	▲	▼▼	–	▲	60,000
Nokian Outpost AT	54	$227	▲	▼	–	▲	▲	▲	▼	–	–	50,000
WINTER/SNOW TRUCK TIRES												
✓ **Nokian** Hakkapeliitta R5 SUV	75	$246	–	▼	–	–	▲▲	▲▲	–	–	▲▲	NA
✓ **GT Radial** IcePro SUV3	71	$155	▲	–	–	–	▲▲	▲▲	–	–	▲▲	NA
✓ **Bridgestone** Blizzak DM-V2	68	$194	–	▼▼	▼	–	▲▲	▲▲	▲	–	▲	NA
✓ **Nexen** Winguard Winspike3	65	$169	▲	▼	▼	–	▲▲	▲▲	–	▼	▲	NA
✓ **General** Grabber Arctic	65	$185	–	▼▼	▼	▲	▲▲	▲	–	▲	▲	NA
Arctic Claw WXI	62	$157	–	▼▼	▼	▲	▲▲	▲	–	▼	–	NA

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/tires. Find the right tires for your car, SUV, or truck.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on about a dozen tests, with braking, handling, and hydroplaning resistance more heavily weighted for many tires. **Braking** tests on ice are from 10 mph; on dry and wet pavement, from 60 to 0 mph. **Handling** combines how well a tire performed in the wet-handling test, steering feel, and an emergency handling maneuver. **Hydroplaning resistance** denotes a tire's ability to resist skimming along the surface of standing water. **Snow traction** tests denote how far a vehicle has to travel to accelerate from 5 to 20 mph on moderately packed snow. **Ride** and **noise** are evaluated subjectively on rough and smooth roads. **Rolling resistance,** as measured by a dynamometer, is a factor in fuel economy. **Tested tread life** is projected from a 16,000-mile vehicle test run on public roads in Texas for many tires. **Price** is approximate retail.

Which Navigation System Is Best?



THERE'S NO EXCUSE for getting lost these days. Navigation systems now come as standard equipment in many cars—both new and used—and are also available as stand-alone GPS devices or apps—like Waze and Google Maps—that you can download for free to your phone. All of these provide turn-by-turn directions and real-time traffic data to help you find the best and fastest route to wherever you're going. Some, however, are better than others, depending on your priorities and budget.

"The navigation systems in a lot of newer cars have features that aren't available in a phone-based app or stand-alone GPS device, and often work with your car's cameras, instrument displays, and other in-car technology to make navigation easier and less distracting," says Kelly Funkhouser, manager of vehicle technology at CR's Auto Test Center. "But there's still a place for phone-based navigation apps and dash-mounted GPS units, especially if you drive an older car with no nav capability but would like some of the latest navigation features."

Below, we explain the various navigation options to help you decide which one is right for you.

BUILT-IN NAVIGATION

WHAT IT IS: A navigation system that's integrated into the infotainment screen and available as optional or standard equipment on most new cars.

PROS: A good built-in system provides guidance that is easy to see without being distracting. The best of these use the car's cameras and other tech to offer enhanced guidance, such as projecting directions onto the windshield in front of the driver. The built-in nav system in most electric vehicles also monitors battery charge and helps you find places to recharge.

CONS: CR's testers found that nav systems with complicated menus and overly specific voice commands (like those in some Hyundai models) can be confusing and frustrating to use. Navigation may be part of an options package that costs extra to buy, and certain premium navigation features can increase the base price by thousands of dollars.

STAND-ALONE GPS

WHAT IT IS: A stand-alone device from companies like Garmin or TomTom that attaches to your dashboard or windshield and gives turn-by-turn directions on a relatively large screen. These models are ideal for someone with an older car that has an obsolete built-in navigation system or no infotainment screen and who doesn't want to use a phone for navigation.

PROS: In addition to providing navigation, a stand-alone GPS can act as an infotainment screen, pairing with your phone to provide real-time traffic updates and even hands-free calling through a built-in microphone and speaker. Some models also include backup cameras, which can be an added convenience if your car does not already have one.

CONS: They're pricey (ranging from about $100 to well over $300) and add to dashboard clutter. As with built-in systems, there may also be a fee to update maps.

NAVIGATION APPS

WHAT THEY ARE: Apps such as Google Maps and Waze, which display maps and provide turn-by-turn voice directions on your phone.

PROS: They're free, and like the newest built-in navigation systems and stand-alone GPS units, they will keep you up to date regarding road closures and traffic jams. Waze goes a step further, providing user-sourced information about the location of potholes, road hazards, construction, and even speed traps. In cars equipped with Android Auto or Apple CarPlay, some of these apps can be displayed on the car's infotainment screen.

CONS: Email, chat, and other pop-up notifications on your phone can be distracting and may partially obscure the navigation screen. If the app doesn't work with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay (or your car doesn't have one of these), you'll need to purchase a phone holder and mount your phone to the dash or to the windshield to keep it at eye level.

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

COMPACT CARS

Subaru Impreza

Practical but Underpowered

76
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 78

HIGHS Agile handling, strong fuel economy, short stops on dry pavement, hatchback versatility, standard all-wheel drive

LOWS Slow acceleration

POWERTRAIN 152-hp, 2.0-liter 4-cylinder engine; continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 29 mpg on regular

PRICE $22,995-$27,885 base price + $1,090 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $28,253

THE REDESIGNED IMPREZA is more of a gentle evolution than a radical rethink. It's a nice-driving car that's light on the wallet, but the base engine will disappoint anyone looking for some giddyup.

The standard 152-hp, 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine seems peppy as the Impreza jumps abruptly off the line, but after that it sounds like it's straining anytime you ask it for real power. At least the continuously variable transmission performs simulated upshifts to help keep engine revs low, and its 29 mpg overall beats any other all-wheel-drive car. The top RS trim comes with a stronger 2.5-liter engine that delivers a more satisfying driving experience.

Ride comfort is competitive for the compact class. The suspension is supple enough to keep things steady, barring the occasional jolt from the car's low-profile tires. It proved fun to handle on twisty roads and posted an admirably high speed through our accident-avoidance test. We were unimpressed by the 149 feet it needed to stop from 60 mph in the wet, though dry stops were sufficiently short.

The manually adjustable front seats are comfortable, and the rear seat has good underleg support, though headroom will be tight back there for taller folks. Controls are reasonably user-friendly, but it's annoying that many of the climate controls are on the touchscreen, rather than physical buttons. At least most of them are always visible and can be used without having to hunt for a climate menu.

AEB with pedestrian detection and highway-speed AEB come standard. BSW and RCTW are optional, rather than standard equipment.

ELECTRIC SUVs

Nissan Ariya

Slow to Charge, With Frustrating Controls

69
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 70

HIGHS Smooth and zippy acceleration, quiet interior, roomy cabin

LOWS Extra steps to unplug, grabby brake-pedal feel, weak onboard charger

POWERTRAIN 389-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; all-wheel drive

CR HIGHWAY RANGE 253 miles

PRICE $43,190-$60,190 base price + $1,335 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $63,020

NISSAN WAS AN ELECTRIC vehicle pioneer when it introduced the Leaf in 2011, so we had high expectations for its sophomore effort, the Ariya. It's quick, quiet, and roomy, and it has a decent driving range. But instead of leading the pack with EV tech, it's merely middle of the road, with a weak onboard charger and below-average DC fast-charging capabilities.

The larger, 87-kilowatt-hour battery we opted for managed a respectable 253 miles in our highway range test. But a puny 7.2-kW onboard charger means the Ariya gains only about 20 miles of range per hour of home charging compared with the 35 miles some other EVs get. Its 130-kW max acceptance rate at public DC fast chargers lags behind EVs from Hyundai and Kia.

Ride comfort also isn't the Ariya's strong suit. It feels stiff, like it's bouncing over bumps rather than the suspension soaking them up. The handling lacks the agility and responsiveness we've come to expect from EVs, thanks to their low-mounted battery packs. Stopping distances were appropriately short, but we didn't like Nissan's e-Step regenerative braking mode. The brake pedal eerily moves toward the floor on its own when you let off the accelerator pedal, and then feels like you're stepping on a brick when you press on it.

The interior has a neat, minimalistic look. But the flush, touch-sensitive climate "buttons" are difficult to press without looking at them, and the seat-heater controls are buried in the infotainment screen. But the way the center console can slide forward and backward is a neat touch.

AEB with pedestrian detection, AEB highway, BSW, and RCTW come standard.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

SUBCOMPACT SUVs

Toyota Corolla Cross Hybrid

A Good SUV Gets Better

80
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 82

HIGHS Fantastic fuel economy, short braking distances, standard all-wheel drive

LOWS Loud cabin, cheap interior

POWERTRAIN 196-hp, 2.0-liter 4-cylinder hybrid engine; electronic continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 41 mpg on regular

PRICE $27,970-$31,155 base price + $1,350 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $31,795

THE HYBRID VERSION of Toyota's Corolla Cross has more power and refinement and much better fuel economy than the conventional model. As such, we think the $2,000 or so extra that it costs to get the hybrid (which comes standard with all-wheel drive) is well worth it, even though the little SUV remains quite loud inside, and still has cheap cabin materials and mediocre seat comfort.

The hybrid takes off from a stop with a smooth electric shove, and the extra power on hand helped it shave almost 2 seconds off the conventional model's run to 60 mph. Unfortunately, the gas engine bursts to life in a startlingly loud fashion when you're looking for quick acceleration, but it's hard to argue with 41 mpg overall—a massive 13-mpg gain over the regular model.

Similar to the conventional version, the Corolla Cross Hybrid feels a bit clumsy and uninspiring during regular driving, though it posted a competitive speed through our accident-avoidance test. The brake pedal feels more "normal" than many Toyota hybrids, though there's some grabbiness at low speeds.

The driver's seat has limited adjustability and delivers insufficient support during longer drives, and both the door and center armrests are woefully underpadded. And although the rear seat has plenty of headroom, the bottom cushion is short on underleg support.

Unfortunately, Toyota's latest infotainment system isn't as easy to use as past versions—some audio and phone tasks require extra steps on the touchscreen.

AEB with pedestrian detection, highway-speed AEB, BSW, and RCTW are standard.

LUXURY ELECTRIC SUVs

Genesis GV70 EV

Quick and Quiet but a Short Driving Range

69
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 79

HIGHS Quick acceleration, quiet cabin, high-quality interior materials, comfortable front seats

LOWS Modest driving range, distracting controls, compromised rear visibility

POWERTRAIN 429-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; all-wheel drive

CR HIGHWAY RANGE 220 miles

PRICE $66,450-$73,250 base price + $1,125 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $67,595

THE ELECTRIFIED GV70 is one of the nicest-driving EVs, with fun acceleration, decent handling, and a quiet, pampering cabin. Unfortunately, its driving range is on the short side, and converting the existing GV70 to an EV brought some interior compromises.

The 77.4-kilowatt-hour battery that's tucked under the floor yielded a dismally brief 220 miles in our 70-mph highway range test. On the bright side, its 10.9-kW onboard charger makes for relatively speedy home replenishment, and its 240-kW max acceptance rate at public DC fast chargers is among the best.

Dual electric motors give the SUV the tenacious traction of all-wheel drive, and thanks to a prodigious 429 hp, it zips from 0 to 60 mph in an impressive 4 seconds. It feels taut and capable when the going gets curvy but lacks the agility of the regular GV70, in part because of the extra 730 pounds it carries. Like many EVs, the brakes can be touchy at low speeds, making smooth stops tricky.

The elegant cabin comes with lots of padded surfaces, high-quality buttons, and textured knobs and stalks. The front seats are cushy yet supportive, with a wide array of adjustments. Rear-seat room is decent, although the higher floor (due to the battery beneath) results in less underleg support.

As with other Genesis models, the GV70's finicky rotary controller dial makes navigating through the infotainment screen confusing. The dashboard display can also be used as a touchscreen, but it's a long reach for the driver.

AEB with pedestrian detection, highway-speed AEB, BSW, and RCTW come standard.

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

Ratings › **New Favorites** The utilitarian Impreza, luxurious GV70 EV, fuel-efficient Corolla Cross Hybrid, and new Ariya are all CR Recommended.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Survey Results		Road-Test Results												Active Safety Systems		
		Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Range, miles [2]	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW/RCTW
SMALL HATCHBACKS																		
✓ Subaru Impreza 2.0L	76	↑	!	78	29	480	↑ / ↑	⇈	!	↑	!	↑	56.0	9.4	129	S	S	O
✓ Kia Soul 2.0L	73	!	!	77	28	395	↑ / ↑	⇈	!	↓	!	↑	55.0	8.8	120	S	S	O
✓ Toyota Corolla Hatchback 2.0L	73	↑	↓	70	36	470	↑ / ↓	↑	!	!	!	↑	53.5	8.7	129	S	S	O
✓ Nissan Kicks 1.6L	65	!	⇊	67	32	340	! / ↑	⇈	!	!	!	!	51.5	10.5	137	S	S	S
Chevrolet Trax 1.3T	57	!	↓	64	31	430	! / !	↑	!	!	!	!	55.0	9.5	131	S	–	O
SUBCOMPACT SUVs																		
✓ Subaru Crosstrek 2.0L	87	⇈	↑	82	29	490	↑ / ↑	↑	!	↑	!	↑	56.5	10.1	128	S	S	O
✓ Toyota Corolla Cross Hybrid 2.0H	80	↑	!	82	41	430	! / !	↑	!	↑	!	!	54.5	7.7	126	S	S	S
✓ Honda HR-V 2.0L	74	⇈	↓	70	27	380	! / ↑	⇈	!	!	!	!	54.0	11.1	130	S	S	O
✓ Toyota Corolla Cross 2.0L	69	↑	↓	68	28	370	! / !	↑	!	!	!	!	58.0	9.3	128	S	S	O
✓ Kia Seltos 2.0L	68	!	⇊	73	28	365	! / ↑	⇈	↓	↓	!	↑	55.0	9.0	128	S	S	O
✓ Mazda CX-30 2.5L	67	↑	↓	65	27	340	↑ / !	!	!	!	↑	↑	54.0	8.7	133	S	S	S
ELECTRIC SUVs																		
✓ Kia EV6	77	!	↑	86	109 [1]	277	↑ / !	!	⇈	↑	↑	⇈	54.5	4.7	126	S	S	S
✓ Ford Mustang Mach-E	70	!	↑	74	92 [1]	299	↑ / ↑	!	⇈	!	↑	⇈	52.0	5.3	136	S	S	S
✓ Nissan Ariya	69	↑	↑	70	87 [1]	253	↑ / ↑	!	↑	!	↑	↑	52.0	5.4	130	S	S	S
Hyundai Ioniq 5	67	↓	↑	86	98 [1]	265	↑ / ↑	!	⇈	↑	↑	↑	53.0	4.7	131	S	S	S
Subaru Solterra/ Toyota bZ4X	62	!	↓	67	102 [1]	210	↑ / !	!	↑	!	↑	↑	53.0	6.4	135	S	S	S
Volkswagen ID.4	56	↓	↓	75	95 [1]	253	⇈ / ↑	⇊	⇈	↑	↑	↑	52.5	5.8	134	S	S	S
LUXURY ELECTRIC SUVs																		
✓ Genesis GV60	75	!	↑	86	95 [1]	251	↑ / ↑	!	⇈	↑	⇈	↑	54.5	5.1	131	S	S	S
✓ Lexus RZ	74	↑	!	70	107 [1]	220	↑ / !	↓	⇈	↑	↑	↑	51.0	4.9	138	S	S	S
✓ Tesla Model Y	72	!	↑	88	122 [1]	330 [3]	⇈ / ↑	⇊	↑	↓	↑	⇈	54.5	4.7	121	S	S	–
✓ Genesis Electrified GV70	69	!	↑	79	91 [1]	220	⇈ / ↑	⇊	⇈	↑	⇈	↑	53.0	4.0	133	S	S	S
✓ Audi Q4 E-Tron	69	!	↓	76	93 [1]	226	⇈ / ↑	!	⇈	!	↑	↑	52.5	5.9	133	S	S	S

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines **road-test results,** survey data for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction**, and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. A dash (–) means no such safety system is offered; O means that it's optional on at least some trim levels; S means the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's gear selector lacks fail-safes to prevent the vehicle from rolling away.

⇊ ↓ ! ↑ ⇈ WORSE — BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

[1] Miles-per-gallon equivalent (MPGe). [2] Based on CR's tests. [3] EPA range.

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The Better Deal

Many of the products we test at CR earn high ratings for their impressive performance—but some are also a really great value. Check out the impressive deals we found for you this month.

ELECTRIC SEDANS

BMW I4
$52,200-$69,700 **83**

THE BETTER DEAL

TESLA MODEL 3
$38,990-$50,990 **71**

THE LOWDOWN

THE BMW I4 is the EV companion to the impressive BMW 3 Series sedan. It is quick and agile, with an impeccable interior. But it is pricey compared with the Model 3, a similar-sized EV sedan that has been updated for the latest model year. The Tesla is eligible for $7,500 in tax incentives, while no federal tax credit is available for the BMW. Both are highly enjoyable to drive, but the Tesla edges out the BMW for value, thanks to its price and the widespread Tesla Supercharger network—which eases some of the anxiety of EV ownership.

MEAT THERMOMETERS

CDN PROACCURATE TCT572-R
$70 **95**

THERMOPRO DIGITAL TP19H
$17 **92**

THE BETTER DEAL

THE LOWDOWN

THESE TWO DIGITAL meat thermometers aced all of our tests. Both are fast, accurate, and easy to use, with large, backlit displays. The $70 CDN—which costs over four times more than the ThermoPro—can show the lowest or highest temperature among multiple readings, making it easier to test different places in whatever type of meat you're cooking. The $17 ThermoPro doesn't have that feature, but it's just as reliable for judging whether your foods have reached a safe temperature.

AIR PURIFIERS

ALEN BREATHESMART 75I PURE
$750 **87**

THE BETTER DEAL

BLUEAIR BLUE PURE 211I MAX
$315 **86**

THE LOWDOWN

ONLY ONE POINT separates the Overall Scores of these two excellent air purifiers. Both do a great job of removing pollen, dust, and smoke from a large room, and both are Energy Star certified. The Alen is quieter when running on high speed. Still, you'll save $400 when purchasing the BlueAir—and you'll also spend about $30 less every year on energy costs and filters with it.

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